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OPEN COUNTRY

A COMEDY WITH A STING

BOOKS BY MAURICE HEWLETT

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A COMEDY WITH A STING

BY

MAURICE HEWLETT

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK : : : : 1909

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TO

THE LADY OF THE COUNTRY

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ADVERTISEMENT

READERS of this Book who may have made acquaintance in "Halfway House," with my friend Mr. J. Senhouse, are to be warned that the events there related took place between the years 1898–1900, *and that what I have here to tell of him must be ascribed to a date four years earlier. There is no relation whatsoever between the two tales beyond the fact that Mr. Senhouse figures in both.*

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OPEN COUNTRY

A COMEDY WITH A STING

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CHAPTER I

STATISTICS OF A RESPECTABLE FAMILY

THE name of Thomas Welbore Percival was soundly respected in the city of London. It stood for a turnover of fifteen thousand pounds, and a private income of at least six thousand a year. It centred in the person of a rosy-gilled, full-waistcoated gentleman of middle life—Mr. Percival was five-and-fifty and admitted it—to whom a joke was dear, and not less dear because its scope and measurements were accurately known. When Mr. Percival came into Lomax's Bank, had said "Morning, Wilkins—growing weather!" to the grey-whiskered cashier, and handed over his slip of green paper, a glance at the back was the only formula. Then came, "How will you take it, Mr. Percival?" and Wilkins had his bundle of notes out and his finger wet before he so much as looked at the figures. Mr. Percival's invariable reply was, "How I can get it, my boy. Honestly if possible—in these days." Such old customs die hard.

Blount and Percival had been the firm. East India merchants they were, trading in the Poultry for more than two generations of traffic; and so the name stood now before the world of men, engraved on well-rubbed brass. But everybody knew that Tom Percival had married Kitty Blount, old Blount's only child, and was now Blount and Percival in his own pair of shoes. Snug Tom, they called him, with a fine girl and a plum to himself; but always added that he well deserved his luck. And still he stuck to his desk, for all his whitening whiskers. Ten to five saw him in the Poultry every day; a four-wheeled cab brought him, and sometimes the brougham would come to take him back; and passers-by saw the flash of a white skirt in the doorway, and told each other, "One of old Tom's pretty daughters come for him." On Saturdays he left at two, and never varied his year for more than a month in August; but what was to happen by and by nobody could tell, for he had daughters, and Mrs. Percival was ambitious, and there were many who doubted whether what had been good enough for Kitty Blount, that strapping girl she had been, would be good enough for Mrs. Percival, high-complexioned, high-stepping lady of Great Cumberland Place. There had been no sons of the marriage—five daughters, but no son; and already Philippa, the eldest, was married to a Mr. Tompsett-King, a West End solicitor with clients in the peerage, and accepted membership of the Athenæum. *That*, said the gossips, had no look of the Poultry about it. And next we hear

of Hawise, the second daughter, engaged to a baronet in the country. A baronet in the country—a county family. The Poultry, on a stool at Sweeting's, shook its head over Kitty Percival, and said, "Hard luck on poor old Tom!"

And yet, if ever a man was happy in his offspring it was this honest East India merchant. He adored them all in various ways, and suited his worship to each with a tact which you had not supposed him to possess. He knew, and never shamed to say, that they were "a cut above him," and often jogged his knees (alone, before his smoking-room fire) in triumph at the thought that, such as they were, he, stout Tom Percival, had begotten them. He knew also that each fair girl of them steered her own separate course, each remote from each, each with a purposeful jut to her sharp chin, each (as it dimly appeared to him) with a definite beacon ahead of her fine bright eyes. His adoration, then, was mingled with respect. He respected Philippa's incisive scorn, Hawise's calm, Melusine's reverie (she was a most graceful girl, and danced beautifully), Vicky's daring and dash, and, above all things in earth or heaven, little Sanchia's coaxing. While Sanchia was a romp, her hair all tumbled about her face, I think Mr. Percival's cup of happiness overbrimmed. She had been a beautiful, healthy child, all roses and roundness, and he had been eight years younger!—still, as he expressed it, in his roaring forties. But now we are in 1894, when Sanchia had had her hair

up some three years, and he was five-and-fifty. Sanchia-Josepha—these romantic names!—was a young lady of twenty, and would be out as soon as Hawise was married to her Sir George—Sir George Pinwell, Baronet, between you and me an insufferable blonde person. And Sanchia, from a rosy coax, was turned into a slim, thoughtful girl with grey and dreamy eyes and a sad mouth. She was quiet now, and rather mysterious, speaking little and (apparently) thinking much. She went her own ways, having acquired (by not claiming it) much more liberty than any of her sisters had had. She was fond of Art, and used to go to a school of painting; she was fond of reading poetry (wherein she differed from her sister Melusine, who said that she was); and she didn't get on with her mother. Comfort and terror contended for her father's soul as he pondered this.

There I have always been with her, I confess. I never could myself get on with Mrs. Percival, who seemed to me to be at once in arms against society and its abject slave. Society, I used to fancy, beat her black and blue; and she kissed the rod. Sir George Pinwell treated her, for example, with such deadly, cold insolence that I defy her not to have known it—and of course no one knew it better; but his name was balm to her lips; she rolled it over her tongue like a salve. She had pride and to spare, ambition and to spare; but the two worked not together. Her ambition ought to have been to win scope for her pride. It was quite the other way. To help her ambition she humiliated herself extremely—until

even her husband, honest man, saw into what sore passes she was getting herself, and tried to rescue her. "I should go slow, Mother; I should indeed," he would say, or, "Damn the fellow" (this of Sir George!); "I'll give him a piece of my mind one of these days." But Mrs. Percival was incorrigible. With a fierce temper of her own and a bitter tongue, she feared nothing but public opinion. The good esteem of her neighbours was absolutely necessary to her; to get it she would school her temper and curb her speech until she must have suffered the tortures of the damned. And she had the knack of turning her sufferings into virtues, as so many women have it. She always got Percival's pity and had kept his love by these means. As her daughter Vicky said, "Mother gets herself into a hole and then looks like an Early Christian." Her daughters judged her far more shrewdly and with less ruth than her husband. Philippa was in her confidence, and gave her the most sympathy; but Melusine was her favourite, because she was so lovely and so refined. Philippa spoke her comforts; Melusine looked or sighed them forth. Grace was in every long line and gentle curve of this pensive beauty; her eyes spoke her fair mind, but otherwise she had little conversation. She danced, I have said, exquisitely, and yet she sat out a great deal. She had many admirers, "quite a court," her fond mother declared.

Hawise, at this time, stood very high in her respect, for Hawise was doing very well for herself. She was exceedingly handsome also, with her mother's

high colouring and large blue eyes; she bade fair, indeed, to emulate her mother's amplitude of charm in other ways. There were those who called Hawise Percival "Fatty." Her neck and bust were superb, but her arms were certainly too big. She was not very tall either. Her temperament was placid; she could always be relied upon for a comfortable opinion, and nearly always agreed with you. By Sir George's wish she took daily horse-exercise with a groom, and she did her best to please him by assuming an interest in lawn-tennis and golf which she was far from possessing. Naturally, she was inert. Her mother used to warn her against it—a "besetting sin." Her father could not value her judgment so much as that of Philippa; but Philippa was married and in Bryanston Square, and he found Hawise's infinitely more comfortable. He had many a cosy talk with her over his cigar before dinner, and used to say of her apple-cheeks that they were as good as a day in the country.

Victoria, Vicky as she always was, comes up next for estimation, a merry girl, very pretty, not shrewish as yet, though that was her danger. Her eyes, of the family blue, shone black in the dusk, like black diamonds, or sapphires so dark as to be black. Her nose was *retroussé* and piquant; her lips smiled; she could be saucy. She was not really so flippant as she seemed, for it was innocence which prompted her to impossible utterances, and gave her hearers many a panging ten minutes. She had a bright, inconsequent way of probing you to the depths which you might

find charming, or might not. It depended very much upon who was there also. There was a Fraülein Winkiewicz attached to the household, a grim Hungarian lady of great reminiscences. Never shall I forget what I suffered at a tea-party—a young people's tea-party, of course—when Vicky asked her what it felt like to be kissed by a man,—"Not an uncle, you know, or a cousin, or anybody of that kind, but a strange man, who takes you in his arms and says, Darling, you are all the world to me, and kisses you. That sort, you know." This was terrible. Vicky, it should be added, was always very much interested in such questions and spared neither age nor sex in her pursuit of information. She gathered, I fancy, a great deal of experience one way and another before she finally accepted the hand and heart of Captain Sinclair. That, however, was not yet. That must have been in '96, and we are now in the early days of '94.

Sanchia, the youngest of these well-endowed girls, was at this time as nearly without sex as a girl of twenty may be. Her mother had kept her back deliberately, but the child must in any case have ripened slowly. I think her mind developed faster than her body. She—at twenty—saw nothing of love, and thought nothing. It may be that she accepted it, like the budding of the trees, as a fact of life, which came in its season. It interested her not at all; and this made at once her distinction, her charm, and her danger. For she shared to the full the franchise of her remarkable family, and was

never ashamed of acting as she felt or saying what she thought. Difficult she found it, always, to speak; but it was not in self-consciousness that the difficulty lay. If she liked a person, or was touched by something said, she would give up her hand; except that she had no motions that way, it might as well have been her cheek. She was at once confiding and reserved, at once extraordinarily frank and extraordinarily reticent (for so young a girl); but her reservations seemed often absurd and her confidences astounding to bewildered youth of my sex. Bewildered youth, agog for captures, panted after her, baffled, faint, yet pursuing. At one hour blessed beyond his hopes, at another chilled far beyond his assured deserts, the marvel is that she went her even way, untouched and unconscious. But she did—with a devastating friendliness which was to beguile a man in every way worthy of her affections, and tumble her at last into the arms of another of a very different stamp. That is the theme to which I propose to devote these pages, and it ought to be a curious study.

Meantime, we have her now, slim and thoughtful, rather pale, with something still of the childish roundness of face which she had worn when her father, eight years younger, could cuddle her to his comfortable ribs, and call her his saucy Sancie, and his love-apple. Her eyes were very large and extremely lovely—blue-grey whites, black-ringed iris, large and palpitating pupils, a deep and serious gaze. She developed later—according to me—into the Beauty

of the Family, though she was always pale. Undeniably she was her father's beloved. He respected Hawise, admired Melusine from afar, and was afraid of sparkling Vicky's audacious criticism. But to his Sancie he could unfold his simple soul. She alone bore with his little jokes: his "A Miss is as good as a mile, hey? And here am I, with five Misses! Quite a long walk for an elderly gentleman." It was Sanchia also who, to please him, egged him on, on Michaelmas Day, to repeat his famous verse:

> Of all fowls in the poultry-yard
> The goose must be preferred;
> There's such a deal of nutriment
> In that weak-minded bird.

Laugh she could not—she laughed rarely; but it was sweet to him to catch the answering beam from her eyes, and her tender smile that met midway with his and blew a kiss to it.

She used to sit with him in the smoking-room—on his knee or on the arm of his chair—while he took his nightcap of whisky-and-water and his last cigar. She said little; but often he told her of the doings at the office, or what old Bob Etherington said, or what old Jack Burmester. He had more household cares for her ear than ever he had for his wife. In her thin hands, upon her virgin lap, lay the destinies of many a sharp young clerk. His heart glowed to feel her charity, his head bowed to her cool judgment. And when she had kissed his forehead and gone to bed, often and often he would stand upright in the middle

of the room, cigar in one hand and toddy in the other, and shut his eyes and pray with all his might, "God bless my Sancie! God bless my girl! And send her happy, for Christ's sake, Amen."

In such uncouth ways the good man bared himself before his gods.

It is only necessary to add to this chapter of particulars the following, which will place us squarely at the opening of 1894. It was decided that Hawise was to be married in June of this year, and that Sanchia could accept the invitation of an old Lady Mauleverer to spend some earlier weeks at Gorston, her seat in the Eastern Midlands. Sanchia had been to school, it seems, with Grace Mauleverer, who was her ladyship's granddaughter, and now Mrs. Percival felt that she was reaping the fruits of a diligent sowing. Lady Pinwell was a good name for one daughter to bear; Lady Mauleverer a good name for the friend of another. The malicious say that she kept a record of titled acquaintances which now contained two baronets, a baronet's brother, and a baronet's widow. Vicky's inference, rather, was that Mamma collected baronets. And not city titles either. Sir George Pinwell was county, and a creation of Charles II. Lady Mauleverer's husband, the late Sir Giles, had been of a still older origin. He *claimed* James I.; but that had been disputed. There had been a Mauleverer creation by that sovereign, but it expired with the patentee's son. Charles I. revived it in the person of a brother of the first

baronet's. The other name on her list—that of Sir Carnaby Hodges—was a George III. title. The family seat was in Gloucestershire, and was unfortunately *let*—to a pork-butcher of Cheltenham. Sir Carnaby, meantime, lived in lodgings in Brighton. He had been a client of Septimus Tompsett-King's for many years. The baronet's brother was Gerald Scales, and most devoted to Melusine. Nothing could be more chivalrous than his behaviour. His way of looking at her across a room reminded Mrs. Percival of the Marquis of Montrose. I don't know why.

Let us conceive then this prosperous family in the spring of the year, when lilacs are a-flower in the London squares, and the London skies are washed pure every night by wholesome showers. In April every Londoner takes thought for the morrow—since the morrow is May. Mr. Percival therefore will bethink him of his white hat, which must be cleaned against next month, and Mrs. Percival of drawing-rooms. Philippa Tompsett-King will have plans for an Easter in Rome, Hawise for her trousseau. Melusine and Vicky ride daily in the park with Mr. Gerald Scales and others. About Sanchia's budding breast the maid now pins breadths of white, that she may be furnished with frocks for Gorston. In Mrs. Percival's phrase, "She may meet *anybody* there." The child must be presentable. She must look her quality. Meantime in a rock-strewn glen, far from the Marble Arch, the three Women, daughters of Night, sit steadfast at their task.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCES THE GENTLEMAN GIPSY

JOHN MAXWELL SENHOUSE, at the age of thirty, had travelled much of the habitable globe without losing his zest for adventure. He was now in England, with no immediate prospect of leaving it; yet every morning he arose, and fronted the day with heart-beats. That announces a habit of mind so enviable as to be extraordinary; and such indeed the man was. He would be extraordinary to-day, was still more so in 1894, which is the date at which we are here and now; in 1884, when he began to live the life which suited him, he was most extraordinary.

He was the only man I ever knew who was able to behold in the rising of the sun a daily miracle. Literally, I have seen him astounded, spell-bound before that filling up of the sky with almost intolerable brightness, and that slow entrance of the King of Life into the great dome, swept, garnished, and made pure for his habitation. This simplicity of mind in Mr. Senhouse was of a piece with his extreme simplicity of habit. He had the knack of reducing complexity into its elements, of drawing order out of chaos. In his ways and words he be-

trayed himself—very nearly primitive man; primitive man, let us say, who has learnt the comfort of washing himself, and has got so far into civilisation as to be able to criticise those who don't wash. He was, as a fact, a keener critic than you would have supposed, and his absorbed eyes, which followed so often his busy hands, took in you and your little tricks and shifts together with a great deal that was vastly more beautiful and curious—and settled for you, off-hand, your place in the scheme of things. He resolved you, in fact, into your elements. Very unpleasant elements, too, they seemed to be when, as might well happen, he exhibited them to you, with a cheerful candour which turned you cold, and seemed to have settled it with the Supreme Arbiter that his analysis was unimpeachable. Mostly you were driven to see that it was.

He had theories about everything in nature and society, and practised more of them than you would have thought possible. There was nothing, he said, in the civilised world—to call it so for the convenience of the moment—which he was not able to go without[1]; and it is remarkable, really remarkable, how closely he could justify that assertion. A house, a bed, a coat, a shirt, money, tobacco, a dinner, a Bible. He did without most of these habitually, and any one of them at a pinch of a week or so. I have known him since '82 or thereabouts, and can swear that he has never had a roof of his

[1] He preferred, for instance, dry sand to soap.

own over his head. He does not need a bed, never wears a coat if he can help it; and as for money, the outside that it costs him to live is five shillings a week, and the utmost that he cares to make by his many arts is a hundred a year. What is over from the bare cost of living he spends in plants. Gardening is his passion, but he has no garden. His passion is to turn all wild England into a garden. To that he has devoted himself day and night. A few years ago he was bribed into Germany to pursue his hobby there. He received—or rather he was promised—a handsome stipend. He did not, as a matter of fact, receive it so, but it was held over for him till the end of the term of years, and handed to him in a lump. He returned it to the Grand Ducal officer, much to that worthy's confusion. But that doesn't come in here at all.

The pages which follow, and the tale which they unfold, are the work of this interesting fellow, and, in a sense, the property of a lady already mentioned. They both live at this hour, and for that reason their names are not warrantable. John Maxwell Senhouse, Sanchia-Josepha Percival—that is as near to their names as I care to go. With this provision, I have the consent of both parties to the publication of letters and this commentary upon them which do them no discredit, and do not reveal an intimacy of which they have any reason to be ashamed. As to the story involved in their relations, and how far it was conditioned by them—that is another affair, to be judged by reader and compiler

on the merits. It is unnecessary, perhaps, to add that while the writer has my sympathy, I by no means share all his opinions with him, and that I have taken upon myself the responsibility of selecting what, out of his letters, I would print. The correspondence as a whole is massive; some of it is occasional; some relates to private affairs, and some to the private affairs of other people. There is a good deal of freedom used in dealing with the names and deeds of persons much in the world's eye. To publish names and comments together might be scandalous; either without the other would be stupid. So also with the tale—such tale as lay in the relations of the eloquent, profuse, and random writer of these letters with Miss Sanchia Percival—I have no more, I believe, allowed my selection to interfere with its course than I could persuade it to sway its fortunes. It is a good tale, as all true tales are, and may be read independently of any correspondence. The reader who chooses may skip the whole budget, and form his opinion of the persons here treated, as he should, by their actions, not by their words.

By way of introduction, however, to such tale as there is, something must be said before it and the letters within it can be left to speak for themselves. Their writer, when I knew him first (red-hot and sizzling with theory), was the most cheerful revolutionary you could conceive of. Anarchism—for he signed himself Anarchist—on his showing, was the best joke in the world. He would have

dethroned kings and obliterated their dynasties as Isaac Walton would have had you impale worms on your hooks, with the same tender nicety. "My dear old chap," one might hear him say to a doomed monarch, "we've had a splendid time; but a game's a game, and really yours is up. You perish for the good of your so-called people, you know; upon my honour, it's all right. Now this bomb is beautifully timed. It'll be over before you can say knife. Just you see."

That was the sort of impression he made upon one in those early days; he was frightfully reasonable and perfectly ridiculous. He was then at Cambridge, King's his college, embroiled for ever with the dons—heading his examination papers, "Down with the bourgeois!" or, "Death to tyrants!"[1] —and yet for ever in their houses. It was the women who would have him there; his manner with women was perfect. He put them on his own level, to begin with, and his level was high. He neither flattered nor bullied, never told fibs, nor paid compliments, nor posed for what he was not; nor, so far as I can learn, did he ever make love. Flirtation and he were contradictories, for, ridiculously as he would put things, and do them, the most ridiculous part of his performance was always that he was perfectly serious. He was all for liberty and equality, and very likely was waiting for the ladies to begin. He would have seen no reason whatever against that; and I can imagine him dis-

[1] This he used to call "sowing the seed."

cussing a tender proposal from one of them with the most devastating candour, lying on the hearth-rug (his favourite place in the room) with his face between his thin hands, and his black eyes glossy with mystery. He was extraordinarily popular; and when he was sent down for some outrageous act or another—I forget exactly what it was, but fancy it had something flagrant to do with the Athanasian Creed—he spent the time of rustication actually in Cambridge, in the house of a Fellow of his college, as everybody knew perfectly well. They dug a canoe out of a tree-trunk, the queer pair of them, and navigated the Cam from Ashwell to Littleport.

He was a great reader but a fitful, an excellent Grecian, and left the University without attempting his degree. He had come, he said, to consider the course of study prescribed an absurdity, and the reward held out to be a foppery unworthy of a serious man's time. Such a man, with that persuasive, irresistible smile of his, he solemnly proclaimed himself in a letter to the Vice-Chancellor—or with what he fully intended to be solemnity. But his manner of leaving Cambridge was so characteristic that I cannot omit it, though I study to be brief.

It was simplicity itself. On a certain May morning in the year 1885 he rose as usual, dressed as usual in grey flannel trousers, white sweater, and pair of nailed boots; breakfasted as usual upon an egg and some coffee, and walked out of his rooms, out of his college, out of Cambridge, never to return.

This was literally the manner of his going. The only thing he took away with him, except the clothes he stood in, was a holly stick. He never wore a hat, and his bedmaker found all his loose change—gold, silver, and copper—lying at random on his dressing-table, and his cheque-book in a drawer. The rest of his belongings, which were ordinary, neither more necessary nor less various than the common run—clothes, furniture, books, pipes, correspondence, including the morning's post, which, I am told, had not even been opened—he left everything where it was, dropped it just then and there, and vanished. Nor was anything heard of him in England for two years, after a letter received by his father, which had the postmark "Cracow" and the date "14th July," in which he said that he had come to the sudden conviction of waste of time, money, and opportunity, and must be excused from indulging either the parental partiality or his own proneness to luxury any longer. He had chosen to come to Poland, he said, because nobody could tell him anything about it except that it was, on the whole, the most oppressed country in Europe. He was uncertain of his return, and begged to assure his correspondent that he was well, happy, self-supporting, and his affectionate Jack.

His adventures in Poland, which led him certainly and expeditiously to Siberia, are no concern of ours just now. He conspired, I believe, in Latin, since he had not the tongue of the country; but, being overheard and more or less understood, to

Siberia he went, and was there lost sight of for a year. How he escaped, whether by intervention from home or his own address, doesn't now matter. I know that he was in England in 1887, for I met him in the autumn of that year in his father's house in the Midlands, irredeemably enthusiastic in the cause of absolute liberty, in touch with Tolstoy, Kropotkin, Stepniak, and half the dreamers of Europe; a confirmed wanderer, a sojourner in tents; as much artist, scribbler, desultory scholar as ever, but with a new taste, which he had acquired in his exile from a fellow-conscript, a taste for botany, which became later on the ruling passion of his life. He was more charming and more ridiculous than ever, and, mentally, entirely naked and entirely unashamed. To please his father—with whom he was on the best of terms—he went into the counting-house at Dingeley for six months; but in the spring of '88 he was off again, none knew whither, though it was discovered afterwards to have been the Atlas, and after that never settled down in the haunts of civilised man for more than a few weeks at a time.

What could be said or done to him? He was of full age, took nothing of his father's store, kept himself entirely to his own satisfaction on his painting and journalism. Of the former I am not qualified to speak. It was a very impressionistic, highly poetical rendering of atmosphere and colour. If Corot was not his master in the art, I am a dunce. As to the other, he wrote pretty constantly for wild

newspapers of which you and I hear nothing—*Dawn*, *The Fiery Cross*, *The Intransigeant*, *The International*—and now and then had a poem in *The Speaker*, and now and then an article in a review. To supply his wants, which were simple, he lived in a tent of his own stitching, which he carried about in a tilt-cart, drawn by a lean horse, well called Rosinante. Everything he owned was in this cart; and he seldom stayed in one place for more than a week. Periodically he would vanish, as the mood took him, and perhaps be heard of in California, Colorado, the Caucasus, or Cashmere; but as he grew older and his passion for naturalising foreign plants grew with him, he confined himself more within the limits of our seas; and his knowledge of England's recesses must have equalled Cobbett's or Borrow's. He was hail-fellow with all the gipsies, tinkers, horse-stealers, and *rascaille* on the road, and with most of the tramps. They all liked him consumedly, all trusted him, but all called him Mr. John, or even Mr. Senhouse. That was odd, because I am certain he did not expect it of them.

Thus wandering, perpetually busy and inordinately happy, one used to meet him in chance angles and coigns of our islands, and more occasionally still in or near the house of a friend: seldom in it, for he nearly always begged leave to pitch his tent in park or paddock, whence to come and go as he pleased. It was during one of these temporary returns to civilisation, as we call it (and how he used

to declaim upon that!), that he became acquainted with Sanchia Percival. It was in 1894.

Of Miss Percival I have said something already. It will be seen that Senhouse's acquaintance with her was in the middle period, that of her dawn, when, as it were, her glory-to-be was palely shadowed forth from her. It lay brooding in her eyes, was to be discovered, like a halo, about her broad brows. She was getting Greek, but wasn't Greek yet: a Greek baby, perhaps, a goddess still at the breast. Her chin had already that roundness which is the type's, but her mouth was not the lovely feature it afterwards became. It still had a pathetic droop; it was tremulous, very expressive of doubt. All this I learned afterwards from my friend on one or other of the rare occasions when he could be led on to talk about her. He showed me, in fact, a curious photograph, of which more in its place. She hit him hard, I know.

They met, as you will see, in the country. She went to stay with old Lady Mauleverer; he came a few days later to a neighbour's house, that of Roger Charnock, the Liberal Member for Graseby; that is to say, he was allowed to be in Charnock's park, encamped there, dining at the house whenever it suited his whim, but otherwise free as air. Charnock and he had been at Rugby together, though the Member had been in the Sixth and the tramp his fag. But Charnock had been kind, and a friendship had arisen and persisted. The rebel was allowed to do as he liked up at Bill Hill.

There was much intercourse between Gorston Park, the Mauleverer stronghold, and Bill Hill, which was Charnock's. Our man, whose high spirits were not to be denied by any one who came within a mile of them, had had them all under his spell from the first. Charnock's boys adored him, followed him about like a couple of spaniels. Even Lady Mauleverer, who knew him of old, called him a "ridiculous creature," which, for her, was a term of high endearment. He was a noticeable fellow, unlike anybody else, very thin, very dark, saturnine, looking taller than he really was. There was something elusive about him, which may have been the effect of his piercing black eyes or of his furtive smile. You could never tell whether he was chuckling at you or with you; he rarely laughed outright. He had the look of a wild animal which seems friendly and assured, but is ready at any instant to dart into hiding. They used to call him the Faun, and tease to be shown his ears. Bill Botetort declared that he wore his hair long and let it tumble about his brows to hide a fine pair of horns. He was a wonderful talker; to see his sallow face light up under the glow of his thought was to feel as if the sun had burst through a great cloud. Like all good talkers, he had fits of long and most eloquent speechlessness. He would sit then with his chin on his knees and bony hands clasped over his shins, and look like a dead Viking crouched in his cairn, vacant-eyed, fixed, astare—a silence, I assure you, that could be felt. Add his strange,

nocturnal prowlings, during which he was supposed to hold mysterious communion with the creatures of darkness—bats, owls, badgers, otters, foxes—and talk secrets with the plants, and you may guess how he might have struck the imagination of young Miss Sanchia-Josepha. a girl on the threshold of womanhood, in the throes of her power to come. At the end of a week, it will be related, they were fast allies, at the end of a fortnight inseparable companions, sketching together every day, and he teaching her to read Greek out of the *Anthology*. At the end of three weeks they were eternal friends, and swore it to each other, no doubt, with the appropriate ritual. That is where their correspondence begins, at the end of that third week. I only have his side of it—he destroyed her letters as they came—and can only give selections, of course. It lasted intensely for two years, with occasional breaks when they saw each other, and was most voluminous. Then it stopped, for reasons which are to be made plain, and which, I shall add on my own account, do the writers credit. A relationship had developed which was not, and could hardly be again, the old one. There was a third party intervening—that also. The man broke it, the young woman accepted his decision. They separated for many years, each going a several way.

Now—after so much preamble—we can get on.

CHAPTER III

OF COMMERCE WITH A DRYAD BY A POOL

On a day in late April Mr. Senhouse was on his way to Graseby in the Eastern Midlands, on a visit to his friend the Liberal Member for that division of the country, and was not far from his journey's end. He had in fact entered the precincts of Churn Forest, a noble belt of woodland incorporated long ago (in the fine and free manner of our forefathers) into the estates of about three great men. A Mauleverer had been one, and the predecessor in title of Charnock, M.P., another. One side of the road was the Gorston property, the other Bill Hill; treeful forest all of it, showing deep and quiet recesses of beech and bracken, interspersed by glades of oak saplings, between whose tapering columns the light lay elfin, and revealed to those who had the eyes to see withal more inhabitants of the wild spaces than common men may discern. Ye charm'd resorts of woodfolk! He who traverses a forest with an eye for timber, or a moorland musing on building sites, will tell you that Pan is dead and the Nymphs no more. That was not Mr. Senhouse's opinion, who had the *Witch of Atlas* by heart.

> And Universal Pan, 'tis said, was there,
> And though none saw him—through the adamant
> Of the deep mountains, through the trackless air,
> And through these living spirits, like a want,
> He past out of his everlasting lair,
> Where the quick heart of the old world doth pant. . . .

He had got so far when he pulled up his lean horse with a slow tightening of the reins, and peered into the shafted glade with narrowed eyes. The forest held him, poet and painter. He saw, and lusted to convey. "I could do it," he said between his teeth. "I could do something of it. It's sheer magic—but it could be done. Corot would have done it—did do it. Damn it—and I?" Then he began again,

> The herdsmen and the mountain maidens came
> And the rude Kings of pastoral Garamant—

"Pastoral Garamant"—oh, thou diviner!

> A lovely lady, garmented in light
> From her own beauty——!

"And what are these oak shafts but garmented in light? That's where the trouble's to be—they are ensphered in light; and I come up with my bistres and yellows! A fool with a paint-box; but here goes."

His brushes were dabbling in colour as he grumbled and stared. He worked with water and a block, drew in nothing, but slobbed on his tints with quick precision, and muttered as he slobbed.

The slender, pale stems ran back in rows into

blue space; their tops, tufted with buds, tinged bright red, were printed upon the fleecy sky—amidships lay a still pool, nearly black where water showed, edged about with dead bracken and young flags, and almost covered with flat lily leaves, with here and there a bud half-opened—for the spring of that year had been out of reason mild.

Mr. Senhouse worked diligently while his lean horse cropped the herbage; and as he worked he grumbled. "I must key up my trees, I must key up my sky. '*Dolce color d'oriental saphiro*'—oh, heavens, what a blue! And the clouds, the clouds!

> Pareva a me che nube ne coprisse
> Lucida, spessa, solida e pulita,
> Quasi adamante che lo sol ferisse. . . .

Painting's no good for this kind of thing; you must have poetry . . . 'Garmented in light,' eh?" Then he laughed outright at a memory—

> ". . . And lumps neither alive nor dead,
> Dog-headed, bosom-eyed, and bird-footed. . . .

Oh, an immortal game!" And then he said suddenly, "Hulloa!" and then no more; but held his breath and looked, a brush in his mouth, another suspended in the air.

A young lady belted in a white frock had come through the trees to the edge of the pool. She had no hat on, and was bare-footed. Intent upon her thoughts, she gazed deeply into the dark water, holding her skirts up out of the wet. It was evident that she was looking at something in there which she

had seen there before; for Senhouse noticed that her eyes sought out at once the object of her search, found it, and became intent. Besides that, he was near enough to see that it was no admiration which made her gaze so nearly. He fancied she was frowning, that her brows were contracted, and began to wonder what on earth it could be that interested her so much. There was perplexity to be seen in her face, hesitation also; she let her gown drop, and meditating, pinched her lower lip in her fingers. She made a charmingly graceful, slim figure, herself so palely coloured, in that woodscape of low tones. The sun's chance rays caught and gleamed in her brown hair—of which she had quantities, not so tidy as it ought to have been, gathered together, apparently, in one loose twist and coiled to lie over the nape of her neck. It looked as if it had been caught up hastily out of respect to the nearness of the high road. His line from Shelley had been apt: here was "a lovely lady garmented in light," indeed.

Senhouse, thoroughly interested, watched her closely, not altogether as painter or poet, to delight in her slender lines, but with the simple curiosity of a man who sees a game played by a player who is unconscious of observation. He had studied nature all his life, and knew very well that unless you see an animal when the animal sees not you, you don't see the animal at all. The truth applies, *ex hypothesî*, to men and maids. It is the despair of the honest-minded among us that the presence

of one sex destroys the simplicity of the other, nine times out of ten. Now this girl was deep in her play, and he wouldn't have disturbed her even if he could: it was all much too good to lose.

Her next action, however, gave him pause to think. "By Gad, is she going to bathe?" In that case, he supposed, he must go, though it would then have been further from his wish than ever. But no! There was a third course. He must stop her. He knew the pool well, and that it was at least twenty feet deep in leaf-mould. Either the lilies would pull her down, or she would go down by nature. The water would be deadly cold—but she couldn't possibly be so foolhardy as that!

She had picked up her skirt again and put one foot forward till it was up to the instep in water. He had seen her start at the unexpected cold, but not withdraw her foot. On the contrary, she had pushed it in to the ankle, and now stood poised on one leg stirring the free foot gently to and fro. Presently she deliberately pulled her clothes up above her knees and took a step into the pond. The quick bubbles foamed round her leg and broke in yellow foam on the water. At that step only she was immersed nearly to the knee.

This would never do. Senhouse, barefooted himself (as he was whenever he was alone), quickly descended from his perch and ran through the glade. He was behind her before she was aware of him.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but pray don't go in much deeper. I know that pool well. It's

fathomless in mud. That's why they do so splendidly, those things."

She had looked up at him directly he began to speak—had turned him a slightly flushed face—and had listened with perfect seriousness, not at all startled or embarrassed. It had not occurred to her to drop her skirt. Her eyes had not faltered or flickered. They were grave, questioning, very blue eyes. When he had said what he had to say, she looked reflectively into the pool and then returned to his face.

"I wanted to pull that weed off," she said. "It's strangling them." She was appealing, it seemed, directly to his reason.

"Beastly stuff, I know it is," he replied, "but, you see, it will strangle *you* if you go in. And that wouldn't do at all."

New matter, not exclusive of hers. She considered this, with her face once more turned to the water.

"What's to be done then?" she asked him by and by.

Senhouse, always very ready to praise God, now blessed His name for a girl who was only able to think of one thing at a time. Her desires appealed to him, also, strongly.

"I suppose," he said, "you want to get the weed out badly."

She smiled slowly and whimsically, as if she had a sense of humour. "I do," she said, "very badly. I wanted to directly I saw it, but I couldn't then because there were people with me."

"I'm people," said Senhouse, and made her smile again.

"Yes, but mine were a different sort of people. Besides, we had been out to lunch." Then she slowly came out of the water and regarded her blackened feet and legs with some dismay.

"It won't hurt you a bit," Senhouse said. "It's beautiful stuff—pure oak-mould. The best in the world."

She assured him with a glance that she didn't mind it; but returned to the question of the pond. Could it or could it not be ridded of crowsfoot and duckweed? Senhouse, bending his mind to the problem, thought that it could. "I'll tell you what we could do," he said, "we could get at it on my bed. But we shall get rather wet. Will you let me do it for you?"

She had been startled at his proffer of his bed; her eyes had opened very wide; but his suggestion that he should do it alone drove everything else out of her head. "Oh, certainly not," she told him. "Of course I shall help you. But it's awfully kind of you to do anything. Did you say your bed?"

"I did indeed, and I meant it. Shall I fetch it?"

She was exceedingly amused. It was pretty to see her dancing eyes as she dared him fetch his bed.

But he fetched it for all that; a wooden trestle-bed on legs that folded underneath. "It will make an excellent raft, I fancy," he said, as he exhibited its properties—and saw her enchanted.

They bickered a little over ways and means.

She was all for adventuring in the raft, and he wouldn't have that. "You'll go over, sure as a gun —head first into thirty feet of mud. Now, do be reasonable. After all, you know, it's *my* bed; and I suppose a man may do what he likes with his own bed." She had to admit that he could, and then compromised. She was to stand as deep in water as she dared and drag the weed in to shore. As a reward she was to be allowed, at the close of the job, to navigate the pool from end to end on the raft—alone. This was agreed to, and preparations began. Senhouse rolled up his flannel trousers as high as they would go, and pushed up the sleeves of his sweater. The young lady produced pins from somewhere about her person, and holding them in her mouth, proceeded to bind her raiment about her middle, and to secure it there. Without a tremor or visible flicker of self-consciousness she revealed to this chance acquaintance as fine a pair of legs as anybody could have to show. Not Artemis, high-girt for the chase, could have bared finer or dared more. The artist in our friend admired, and the man was stirred. He dated his subjection from that moment.

Thus accoutred, or unaccoutred, the pair set to work; Senhouse riskily in the middle with a bill-hook and crooked stick, she thigh-deep in the mud with willing arms and another crook of his immediate cutting. In ten minutes they were wet to the skin and as dirty as you please; but with every soil and splash she showed more beautiful to his eyes. These

contrasts enhanced her glow. Flushed and dishevelled, exquisitely disarrayed, with her ardent eyes and fierce yet easy motions, she stood for him as the incarnation of all that is keen and lovely in youth. "A pard-like spirit, beautiful and swift," he thought of; and next, "She is a portion of the loveliness which once she made more lovely." And how she worked! As though a seraph of the fire was urging her from within.

Then, when the task was almost done, there came a rude interruption. Smothered laughing from the wood, and then a boy's bold voice—"Got you, Sanchia!" A boy, two boys, leapt out from behind a tree—one flourishing a camera—and raced down to the water's edge.

"What'll you give me; what'll you give me for the photo?" cried one; and the other, "Well, you *are* a beauty, I must say." Then both looked at the raft, and after a moment of shock cheered Senhouse.

"Hurrah, it's Jack! Hulloa, Jack, how are you? Have you come in your cart? And—oh, I say, do let me go in that raft." He hugged himself, and danced about. "I say! This is awful fun!" he seriously told his brother.

Senhouse twinkled. "Neither of you touches it until this lady has had her turn. I promised it to her ages ago. But you'll have to try it, of course —one at a time. I recommend you to toss up for first shot. Meantime, I'm coming ashore."

He was watched with almost painful interest; one of the lads was twittering with excitement.

"Oh, I say, Sanchia, *do* look sharp," was all he could say. The other was older and had time to criticise his betters. "Well, I must say, of all the beastly scarecrows I ever saw——" That was as near as he could get, and quite near enough.

But, "Dowser, my young friend," Senhouse admonished him, "we've been performing deeds of mercy at which it ill becomes you to jeer. We've been visiting the sick in their affliction."

"Yes," said Dowser, who was a sharp lad, "that's all very fine—but not keeping yourselves unspotted from the world, I'll be shot."

Sanchia laughed outright, but Senhouse checked by violence the guffaw he could have awarded.

"Dowser, you're getting pert," he said. "I've seen you, after a football match, in a state to which this is undriven snow. Instead of which you cheek your betters. Go to, Dowser; Percy has first shot at the raft."

"Oh, but, please——" Sanchia began, and he said, "Of course," and bowed her to the peril. She stepped gingerly to its middle, balancing with her hands; and to Dowser's "Bet you go in," replied with a defiant grimace. "Hand me your stick, please," she bade Senhouse, without turning her head, and then canoed herself across. The boys ran capering round to meet her, and Senhouse breathed again when he saw her touch land. While the pair were urging a fierce career among the lily-leaves and getting wetter than their wildest dreams could have bade them hope to be, Miss

Sanchia, having unpinned her skirts, prepared to make her farewells.

"It was awfully kind of you—and I'm afraid you're very wet. And your bed—is it really your bed?"

He reassured her. "It wasn't kind at all. I love those sorts of things—and I'm not half so wet as you are. And it is really my bed."

"Do you sleep—do you carry your——?" She glanced over to the cart in the road and the cropping white horse. Senhouse, darkling, smiled.

"I suppose you think it all very odd," he said. "It doesn't seem at all odd to me. Quite the other way, in fact. I hate indoors, and love outdoors. So my indoors is your out. What you call creature comforts are my extreme annoyance. That's all. I've done it now for nearly ten years."

She watched his face as he talked, and then considered the matter. "It's very interesting. I don't know why it should be odd." Then, with quick interrogation, she asked him, "These boys knew you. Are you a friend of theirs?"

He told her they were the sons of his host. "I'm going to stay with Charnock. On my way now—that is, I *was* on my way before all these larks began. And may I ask——?"

"I'm staying with Lady Mauleverer," she told him, but didn't add her name.

He cared nothing for her names, having already invented three or four of his own for her. "Oh, that's all right," he said. "Then we shall meet,

and you shall see all my arrangements. The bed will be dry by then—besides, I'm independent of beds. I use the ground mostly."

She absorbed this information through the eyes —he had never seen any one with a more alimentary gaze—and presently offered him her hand. Then she went smoothly through the wood, and disappeared among the oak-stems.

The two boys took it in turns to drive the white horse, Senhouse stalking beside the cart with long springing strides. It was difficult to get facts out of them. "Oh, she's Sanchia, of course. Frightfully good sort," was Dowser's contribution; to which Percy added, "Staying with old Pussy-Cat Mauleverer." Thus he alluded to the stately relict of the late Sir Giles.

But Senhouse must have more. "Sanchia who, you young raff?"

"Sanchia Percival, of course. Sanchia-Josepha Percival is her name, England is her nation; London is her dwelling-place, and Christ is her salvation."

"Oh, shut up, Dowser, you silly ass," he was reproved by his brother. "That's profane, father says."

"I don't see why it should be profane," said Senhouse, "if the facts are so."

To which the Dowser, who always had an answer to everything, replied that of course the facts were so, as she was jolly High Church.

And so they came to the park of Bill Hill and pitched a camp.

CHAPTER IV

BETWEEN BILL HILL AND GORSTON

Bill Hill, "the seat," as local authorities are fond of explaining, "of our genial and respected Member, Roger Charnock, Esq.," is an imposing pile in the Georgian taste, made hideous by continuations and additions in stucco, modelled, it would seem, upon the Pavilion of Brighton. That is to say, the centre of the house is a tall rectangle, vividly red, with a coping of white stone; added to which are circular wings, two storeys in height, turreted, crocketted, bedomed and bepinnacled, spreading out embracing arms like those of the Colonnade of Saint Peter's. The area which they enclose is known as the Italian Gardens, and ends in a parapeted terrace. Beyond that stretch "park-like grounds," with some good trees clumped about, and a small herd of fallow deer, which justify—yes, they do justify—Mr. Charnock in believing himself the owner of a deer-park. On the edge of that the woods begin, and those are magnificent. Just within the shelter of them, in an open glade, hidden from sight of the windows of the house, Mr. Senhouse (that unconscionable guest of Bill Hill) had pitched his tent, tethered his horse, and hung out

his sweater and trousers to dry. The Dowser (whose name was really Roger, after his father) had assisted cheerfully in the washing and wringing of the miry garments, had stretched the line between tree and tree and pegged them up. But he had remarked as he did so, "I say, I advise you to take these down before the pater comes to see you, or there'll be a holy row. He thinks bags are frightfully indecent."

Senhouse took this grimly. "Doesn't he think it more indecent to be without 'em?" he had asked.

The Dowser never laughed—boys don't, unless somebody gets hurt by accident. When he was amused he appeared to choke, and immediately began to work at something with energy.

"He thinks they're indecent when they're off you. He likes 'em on you. Directly they're off he loathes 'em. The pater's awfully rum."

"Everybody's rum, Dowser, except you and me," Senhouse said, lighting his pipe.

The Dowser stared. "You!" he said. "You! Good Lord, I should jolly well think you *were* rum." He became confidential. "I say, I think I ought to tell you. The pater thinks you're cracky, you know."

Senhouse was deep in enjoyment of his pipe and this youth. He nodded his head, revelling. "I'm sure of it—dead certain—God bless him. Now, would it surprise you to learn that I think *him* mad? Stark and staring?"

The Dowser said, very shortly, that he didn't

see that at all, and changed the conversation. "I think I ought to tell you," he began, and Senhouse threw up his head and appealed to the skies, to Dowser's confusion of face. "Well, I do think so," he pursued in a stately manner. "I fancy it's important, but I may be wrong."

"Oh, go on, Dowser, go on," said Senhouse, "or I shall die of you—in aromatic pain."

"It's just as you like, of course," the youth explained. "But as a matter of fact, Percy did take a snap-shot of you and Sanchia in the pond—and he's printing 'em now." Senhouse betrayed a gleam in the eye. The lids narrowed, the pupils contracted, but he sat as carven as a Red Indian. He pulled three times at his pipe and swallowed all the smoke.

"If Percy will give me a print of that photograph," he said, "I shall present him with ten bob and my blessing."

"He'd present you, as you call it, with fifty for half-a-crown," said the Dowser with the utmost scorn. "Ten bob! Why, it's absurd—besides, I don't suppose you've got ten bob."

"I can earn it, you know, Dowser," said Senhouse meekly, but with guile.

The Dowser and his brother were both going to Eton that summer, and quite aware of the importance of the step. But they had not yet reached the point of considering their firm friend Mr. Senhouse otherwise than "splendid." They enjoyed

every ounce of him, and every vagary which desolated their father seemed to them still "a spiffing game." That a man should sleep in a fur-lined sack, wash his own trousers, tend his own horse, cook his own cutlet, and peel his own potatoes—and yet, mind you, be a gentleman—still opened up to them possibilities of pleasure beyond the flights of Mr. Henty, Mr. Stevenson, or Mr. Manville Fenn. Frightfully exciting and frightfully convenient. Here, you see, was Robinson Crusoe actually next door: next door! nay, in the park of Bill Hill, adventuring daily, living from hand to mouth—in a condition in which anything might happen at any moment, calling for the use of stockades, rifles, and plenty of ammunition. It was, of course, a pity that he refused to shoot, because obviously he would be—he must be (a chap like that)—a splendid shot. But you can't have everything; and to be the most exciting man in the world—Robinson Crusoe and the Last of the Mohicans combined—*and a gentleman*, did seem a combination of hazard and safety almost too good to be true. Yet here he was, stockaded once more in the park, and as ripping as ever—not a bit changed; not he!

It cannot be said that he appealed with equal force to the prosperous father of these boys. Roger Charnock, M.P. for Graseby, seated nobly in Bill Hill, surveyed his guest-chambers and was annoyed with his friend. The house was far from full; it had, in fact, besides the family, only his noble brother-in-law, Lord William Botetort—for

Mr. Charnock had married blood—and Miss Dreen, whom the boys (for reasons best known to themselves) called Misdemeanour. Now, Lord William was very urbane, and of course accepted men as he found them, and Miss Dreen was very poor, and had to; but it looked very odd—it must look so; and it was uncomfortable that a woman like that should see Senhouse come and go from a tent to the dinner-table, and be so entirely at his ease and take everything as a joke, and an excellent joke at that. And of course there were the servants—oh, there were times when Charnock (before the fire in his great library) lifted up his hands in despair and let them fall clattering to his sides. He must speak to Jack seriously, take him aside. It was damnably awkward—and the Pauncelows coming next week, and very possibly the Badlesmeres, who were staying at Critchford. If he could persuade Jack, now, to put on a swallow-tail coat for dinner—or even a black one; was that too much to ask of a man who was staying with you? Surely not, surely not. Other people did these things, and surely the ways of decent society—! And yet Mr. Charnock furrowed in his whiskers, and turned desperately to the fire, and said Pshaw! and stretched out his arms to their length—and knew in his heart that, much or little, he should *not* ask it of Jack Senhouse.

The worst of Jack—and Charnock knew it—was his undoubted ability. He could talk like the Archangel Gabriel, and reason like a kind of Socrates, with an infernal, insinuating, artless craft which

landed you in a vital contradiction before you knew where you were. He had the knack, impossible to the good Charnock, of putting the things you did as a matter of course in such a light as to make them appear the acts of a maniac; and no man of assured position, who does nothing (and makes a point of doing nothing) which is not done in good society, likes to be gibbeted to his guests, children, butler, and household as a lunatic at large. Yet, if you weren't mighty careful, that was just what Jack did—and seemed entirely ruthless, too, when he was fairly under way. Why didn't he go for Bill Botetort, for instance? What did he, Charnock, do that Bill Botetort didn't do? And with much more justification, too—for Bill Botetort was as poor as a rat, and he, Charnock, could pay for *his* little things. Damn it all, you know, Jack went too far occasionally. The little things of Bill Botetort were passed over—though he never paid for 'em—and his, Charnock's, were put down as the deeds of a lunatic. He was damned if he saw how the point came in; but he knew, too well, just where it came in and how confoundedly it hurt. All this, you will allow, was rough on a man who tried to do his duty by his motherless boys, and to serve his country, and stick to the Newcastle programme, and pay ready money for his little things.

And what an odd thing it was—he sat now, nursing one well-clad leg upon the other—that old Lady Mauleverer took Jack so well. The last

person in the world, you'd have thought. But when she came over the other day with Grace, and that pretty Percival girl, the very first thing she said when she was in the Hall was, "Where's the Rolling Stone, Roger? I beg you to produce the Scholar-Gipsy." And old Jack called out from the case of birds (where he was with the boys), "Here I am, my lady, still gathering no moss"; and down he comes and shakes hands all round just like a chap in decent clothes. And in a white sweater and flannels—and in sandals—and (as anybody could see) with not another stitch on him anywhere. And, as you might say, he ran the whole place after that; took them all off in a troop across the park—with the boys racing in front like young Indians—and turned out his whole kit for them to see. Bill Botetort there too, as keen as mustard. If you'll believe Charnock, there were things—garments—rags of sorts—hanging on a clothes-line. Upon his soul, it was pretty stiff, you know, that.

Everything was dragged out—chafing-dish, kettles, pots and pans, bed-clothes, sleeping-sack, tom-cat, which he calls Mufti and pretends is a familiar spirit—you can't help smiling at the fellow, you know, he's such a thundering ass—oh, and a whole heap of oddments (his "library"!—three old Delphin classics and a Tom Jones and a Shelley); and then a lot of plants which he was going to stick about in the woods, if you'll believe Charnock. Bill Botetort had been really excited about that: you can always tell when he's inter-

ested, because he twitches his ears; and old Lady Mauleverer insisted on his spending a day in the Gorston coverts—which are the best in the county—planting 'em. Charnock really didn't know what her man would say, to be called off his orchid-houses for the whole blessed day, sticking in snippets of things from South America in the woods.

But that wasn't all. Charnock admitted freely that Jack was an all-rounder. You never seemed to get to the end of him. The little Percival girl found out somehow that he painted in water-colours, and then there was no stopping her. Keen! Why, her eyes shone like sea-water in the sun. And she hadn't a word to say. She just stared and swallowed his things one after another, as if she was frightened of 'em. It was extraordinary. My lady insisted on buying one or two—and paid for them down on the nail. Thirty shillings apiece she gave, and Jack pocketed the money, and said to Percy (by the way), "Now I can pay you that ten bob I owe you." He gave the girl a thing she liked—a washy thing of the pool in Gorston Thicket—an unfinished thing, evidently; but she seemed extremely grateful to him; and the whole jaunt ended up by my lady telling him he could come to Gorston whenever he chose—"as you know very well," she had put it—and must see the girl's sketches. He went there to tea that afternoon, and Bill Botetort with him, and of course the boys; and he didn't turn up at Bill Hill again for at least three days. Well, you know (Charnock put it to himself), to

say the very least of it, that's a queer sort of guest for a man to have about. But Jack must be allowed for, that was clear—and after all, he had begun this sort of thing before he left Cambridge, and the odds were that most people *did* allow for him. It was impossible to help liking Jack, too —quite impossible to be annoyed with him for long.

And then Mr. Charnock, with a sigh, lit a fresh cigar, and went out into the sunshine to interview his head-keeper.

Meantime the unconscionable guest, for the first time in his life (as he told himself) had centred all his hopes of Heaven in the slim shape, pale face and deep blue eyes of Miss Sanchia Percival. Thorough-goer that he was, he set no bounds to his affair. He loved her in the most romantic way, exulted and triumphed in her beauty, absorbed in ever-growing wonder her still ways, adventured (entirely in vain) into the thickets of her mind, pondered every simple syllable she uttered, and found grace beyond the power of telling in every quick movement of her thin hands. His passion was wholly contemplative; it was enough—more than enough—for him to see and glory in her. He would not have revealed to her, for all the kingdoms of the world, what he felt about her. He would as soon, he said, seek the favours of Diana of the Ephesians as dare to expect one charged look from her eyes. "Why," he cried, "more than half her unearthly

beauty lies in her complete ignorance of it. The simplicity with which she—Goddess born—goes about the common ways of life and with ardour shares our silly aims has something in it of humility which fills my eyes with tears. Sheer thanksgiving—sheer gratitude in me. I go about singing Pæan! She's Artemis the Bright come to earth again. Artemis Einodië—Our Lady of the Ways. She can only be served by song; no common speech of ours is wholesome enough. She's Artemis Hymnia, to whom the crocus-vested Caryatides lift up arms and voices in one strain. She's Mab, Queen of Faery; she's, of course, the Lady of the Lake. I believe the blue-bells bow their heads to her as she walks the woods; and I know that the nightingale is hushed as she passes, for fear he lose one waft of her breath. But afterwards he throbs out in one long gush of pride her presence and his hope of her again. His throat is a melodious well, and my pen can never run dry any more. *Una donna pietosa, e di novella etade*—O Florentine, you never took more glory from your lady's green eyes than I from the sapphire deeps of mine! But you sang much better, confound you. However, I shall have a shot." And he did. If he sketched with Sanchia all day, he rhymed with Erato all night.

She knew absolutely nothing of this—if it be credible that a girl of twenty can spend her days with a man ten years older and not see what is the case with him. He, at least, would have sworn his secret unguessed. It seemed to him the most

beautiful thing (by far) about her that she accepted his companionship with the simple satisfaction she would take of every soul, male or female, who had to give that which she stood in need of at the moment. So far as she was concerned, he met, or flattered himself he met, her immediate wants. She had many, but love was certainly not one. She wanted guidance in her sketching, and his was exactly that which she wanted most. She had seen in a moment that he was a master in that art. She wanted guidance in a world which was rapidly becoming complex and baffling; and he could pare off detail and accident so nearly that the straight bold outline of conduct lay plain to be seen, stretching far and ahead of her like parallel lines of railway over swamps. To talk with him was to be taken on to a windy height and shown the world of men mapped out below you, accidentals blurred away, only the salient things sharply defined. Sure of this, she gave him her hand, and in the hollow of it her soul. She could have told him anything and everything; but his value to her lay just in this, that one need tell him nothing—he seemed to understand. Speech was always difficult to her, though she thought much, and always (while the thought remained unvoiced) in a set form of words. But to him a hint was enough, even silence was enough, and this made him invaluable to her. She could not imagine, sometimes, how she had ever done without him. There was not, I need hardly say, the shadow of a feeling of love for him in her. She

took him as a gift of God, as meat to one starving, and said grace and filled herself.

And so she continued to take him, thanks to a certain irresponsiveness with which she was endowed, a certain insensibility to outside opinion which she could assume at will. Her friend Grace Mauleverer was two-and-twenty; and at that age two years is very much indeed. Grace Mauleverer, through the eyes of two-and-twenty, saw what was going on, and knew exactly what was the matter with Jack Senhouse. With that unnecessary and exaggerated caution which young ladies so cheerfully impress upon their bosom friends, she had felt it her duty to give Sanchia what she was pleased to call a hint. The hint had been imparted at the hour of going to bed, when both girls were partially disrobed, and both had their hair down. Sanchia had, in all innocence, brought up the name of Senhouse. "No, I can't come," she had said, "because I'm going to sketch with Mr. Senhouse. He says we're to take lunch, so I expect we shall."

It was then that Grace Mauleverer had said, "I should take care, my dear."

Sanchia had looked up at herself in the glass, before which she was stooped, brushing out her hair. She had looked up at herself, and above herself at her friend's intrigued face which was behind her. Her eyes were wide open, and her eyebrows steeply arched. "What on earth do you mean?" she had asked. "What am I to take care of?"

"My dear!" protested Miss Mauleverer, and Sanchia had coloured.

"I don't know in the very least what you mean," she had said.

Miss Mauleverer found this to be as it might be. "You are not going to tell me that you don't know things."

"What things?"

"Oh, ordinary things. That Mr. Senhouse is attracted, for example——"

"Do you mean attracted by me?"

"Well, Sancie, I don't mean attracted by Granny."

Then Sanchia had made the baffling utterance, "If he is, I don't see why he shouldn't be. He's been awfully kind, if you mean that."

"But I don't mean that," said Miss Mauleverer—"not the least in the world."

"Then," said Sanchia, "I don't know what you can mean. And I think it's rather stupid to talk about those things, anyhow. There are much more exciting ones, quantities and quantities. He's going to teach me Greek and Italian—and if that isn't exciting, nothing can be."

"I'm sure it will be most exciting," Miss Mauleverer said, and compassionately kissed Sanchia. She had done her duty and had been snubbed for it; but the snubs of twenty are compliments to twenty-two.

CHAPTER V

GREEK AND ITALIAN

THE love which filled Senhouse, heart and soul, had very possibly a physical base, for if she had not been caught playing Dryad, had not waded thigh-deep in the pool, his senses might never have been enthralled; but as it gained in volume and mass it became more and more an affair of the intellect. It was the glimpse he got into her mind, the chance-caught vistas of mind-scape, so to speak, rarer than any blue distance dreamed of by Claude; it was these unspeakably fair gleams which enthralled his contemplation. He thought of her as a hedged garden, where wild flowers were set in borders, and hinted the more fragrantly their native simplicity for the trim pattern they were schooled to fulfil. This was where she ravished him quite; she was like a wood-nymph half-tamed, meek in a stiff gown and belt, her quick feet in little narrow shoes and stockings; her wild hair knotted behind her head, her quick eyes recollected, her nimble movements always curbed. And yet below bodice and belt you could sense the heart beat faster for the wild kiss of the wind on the cheek; and you could well believe that in woods, on airy summits of hills,

in meadows by streams, in ploughlands after rain, she was living a double life—within, the ears of her heart alert to secret strains, magic calls, and incitations to be free; outwardly, all her beautiful body staidly disposed to the common world's observances. Here he saw her humble, and could shed tears of pride in such condescension; there he knew her indomitable, and could sing *Te Deum* for her immortality.

This double nature of hers made him wary in what he taught her. He was a man full to the throat with theory. He was deliberately an Anarchist; extremely a freethinker in religious matters, though he had much more native piety in him than any dogmatist. But he found her implicitly the daughter of a sound old tory merchant, and of a High Church, emotional mamma: here was the fount of her incarnation (as he put it); here lay her predestined road through our world; therefore he held off politics and religion as long as he could. Art, poetry, plant-lore, beast-lore, travel, and the humours of mankind: he made these the staple of his talk.

But as the golden days sped along, he found that she was not inclined to take her surroundings for granted. She betrayed curiosity about his manner of life; wanted to know why he lived in a cart, and why Mr. Charnock was so perturbed that he should do it. Finding herself grouped with Mr. Charnock, she was disposed to defend her positions, though he had never attacked them. By and by,

growing bolder as she grew at ease, she began to attack *his* positions. Did he go to church? Was not one bound to communicate at least three times a year (of which Easter to be one)? Did he not think submission to authority a discipline? and so on. Lover as he was, and a neck-or-nothing man by temper, he was deeply touched; but he did not attempt any reasoned defence. That which had been abominable to him he found reasonable in her, and even admirable. Therefore he went to church with her on week-day mornings, and spent the hour of the muttered sacrifice in a contemplative ecstasy. Sanchia at prayer! Her folded knees, her folded hands, her lovely bowed head, her touchings of the breast (as the points of the Cross were illuminated by her finger-tips)—here, it's to be owned, were the objects of his adoration. Yet he had never been nearer to the God of the English than in these weeks, and he did not get much further away during the years of which this book is to tell the tale. She led him, you see, a willing captive to her hand—that is, her outward, beautiful seeming led him so. But her life was double, the Dryad thrilled within her; and with the wood-girl she secretly was, the faun in him sped fleetly in the Open Country.

As to her painting in water-colour, she was firm to go on with it; and here the artist in him had to contend with the lover. The tussling between this pair was often grim, and was never fought to a finish. Senhouse was inexorably artist—perfectly positive in his vision, secure in his technique, and scorn-

ful, like all artists, of anything but absolute perfection. Now Sanchia had much of the temperament, and all of the passion, which an artist must have; but she had not the vision, and could never have the audacity—that intrepidity of aim which cannot possibly miss the mark. That he knew within the first half-hour of work with her. She would never paint, as he understood painting—never, never. Again he was touched; again he felt that he loved her the more wildly for her very limitations; and again he laid violent hands upon himself; and when he wanted to cry out upon the weakness of her work, lashed out upon some botching in his own. Here was a safety-vent. He painted with her, himself, always, and cut his stuff to ribbons in order that she might learn something from it. I don't believe that she ever saw through this ruse. He took endless pains that she should not.

But it was clean impossible that a man of his sort should gag himself at every turn; and he did not. In poetry he let himself go free. He read her Shelley, Homer, Dante, the *Anthology*, and himself. During those three weeks he wrote a sonnet about her every night, and read one to her every morning. They professed to tell the praises of a heathen divinity—the swift Goddess who delights in arrows; and I should very much like to know what she thought about them. I have no difficulty in determining what Miss Grace Mauleverer would have thought if she had been present; but she was

not. The morning reading always took place in Gorston Woods on the way back from early church. For Sanchia, it seems, fell into the practice of attending the Communion service daily during her three weeks at Gorston; and Mr. Senhouse followed her meekly, as led by a string. On the return, as I say, he read her the sonnet of the previous night.

He wasn't, in my opinion, so good a poet that I need present a specimen of his sonnets. Painting was really his art. But he was well read in Greek, Italian, and English literature, and exceedingly sensitive to *nuances* of style. There was undoubtedly a touch of the austere grace of the *Anthology* in what he did, something of Dante's naked simplicity—that matter-of-fact statement of poetical truth in the terms of literal truth—and more than a little of Shelley's intoxicating eloquence. Perhaps you may guess his quality from this criticism: if you don't, I must present you with a verse or two by and by. Anyhow, whether he was true poet or mere versifier, he was an uncommon rhapsodist. Over Shelley's *Prometheus* he poured out his praise in a torrent. He called it the greatest blank verse in the English language, and put Milton next; then Keats, in the revised *Hyperion;* then Wordsworth, in *Tintern Abbey.* Tennyson he put last, and refused to admit Browning into the company at all. *The Ring and the Book,* even the best of it, was much too lyrical, he said. Browning was a singer, not a bard. The finest imaginative touch in the whole of English poetry, by the way, he con-

sidered to be Panthea's words in the *Prometheus*, where Ione says:

> Sister, I hear the thunder of new wings,

and then Panthea·

> Their shadows make
> *The space within my plumes* more black than night.

He thundered this passage upon her, and she absorbed him palely, with her wondrous eyes rounded upon him. "I tell you, Sanchia"—she was well Sanchia, he Jack by this time—"that's terrific, and the mastery of it takes away the breath. It's one thing to image these sea-women in the mind, gazing there, half-immersed, at the foot of the tortured giant's crag. One sees them as he did, looking up, like cormorants deep in the sea, sideways and pondering; one sees the swirl of the green water, and the spray run up the rock at every surge. But there's more to do, since Shelley sees much more. There are wings: oh, Heaven, 'the thunder of new wings.' First they hear and then they see. 'These solid mountains quiver with the sound'; and then you have it:

> Their shadows make
> The space within my plumes more black than night.

Oh, Lord, Lord, Lord! Think of it! He's got it all by that. Not only the huge impending shades, sweeping over like a driven cloud—but don't you see the wings of those who see what's coming? 'The space within my plumes'; that's the masterstroke. Imagine those spaced plumes, please. Just

shut your eyes, and see the ragged, flaggy things." Here he paused, and sat glooming, dark, oracular, like a bald-eyed Sphinx in Egypt, for a space of time. And then he seemed to despair of men, and laughed it off. "There's immortality assured in a line like that, if anybody knew anything about it; but of course nobody does. A man of old had been accepted as a Seer, a woman as a Sibyl, for less than that. But that's not our way. Some thousands of besotted householders have read that over the fire, and not one but does not take it for granted that it was put there 'to round off the sentence.' But Shelley knew. 'Thou shalt outlive the shadow of our night.' Yes, my dear, *he* knew. So I suppose it's all right."

He bewildered her, no doubt, but he excited her, and interested her vastly. She grew mentally more during those three May weeks than in three years of Great Cumberland Place or of the High School, where she had made friends with Grace Mauleverer. Yet her growth, as he was glad to see, did but broaden her base, not shift it. She had too much character to relinquish the habits in which she had been bred simply because she was being swept off her feet and carried through the air on flights undreamed of before. Instead of discarding her old ideas, she made room for the new ones beside them, and did not see, or care to find out, what incongruous company they were keeping. She had a critical faculty of her own, too, which she employed freely when she found herself on terms with her volcanic

friend. She began, as a pioneer, with the fringes of him. She thought, for instance, that he smoked too many cigarettes, and said so. He returned at once to his pipes. She suggested next that he might concede a dress coat to the stately company which gathered at Bill Hill towards the end of his visit. He admitted that he hadn't got one, but produced a blue serge jacket, which looked black by lamplight, and went up to dine with the Badlesmeres in a white shirt, black necktie, and this jacket. These tributes to her power she received with a becoming absence of elation. If she was flattered she did not let him know it.

I said that his love for her became speedily intellectual, and I maintain that it did even though temptations in quite another direction were very strong. Sanchia had an absence of self-consciousness, a simplicity and a directness which were very dangerous. Her hand was his to hold whenever he pleased; she never pretended that she was not glad to see him, proud that she was his chosen companion, that she knew more of his thoughts and intentions than anybody at Gorston, or Bill Hill either. When she was absorbed in work, or thought, or reverie; when she was thrilling at his eloquence or glowing under his influence, he might have captured her hand, or her waist; to have kissed her cheek or touched her hair would have been a natural demonstration of his feelings which would not have startled her in the least. He knew

that; he could see that she had not a glimmer of sex about her; she had the mind, the pure passion, the preoccupation of a boy. To kiss, to be kissed, would have been nothing to her, as simple as eating your dinner. It is not to be set down to his credit that he respected her young confidence: he would have been ashamed to be praised for that. It was simply impossible for him to do anything else than respect her. He would as soon have laid lover's hands upon the Madonna.

And so passed in and out three weeks of May 1894—weeks, for him, of glamour, enchantment, and hidden choirs, and, for her, weeks of shyly stirring thoughts, and of dawning wonder for her young eyes.

As for Greek and Italian, you don't acquire a smattering of these literatures in three weeks, though you may be kindled. He gave her rhapsodies from each, stormed out choruses from the *Agamemnon* and *Seven against Thebes*, paraphrased Andromache's lament and Nausicaa's entertainment of the travel-spent Ithacan; translated for her the whole of the *Vita Nuova*, and guided her faltering tongue through a canto or more of the *Purgatorio*. And he made great play with the *Anthology*, and proved to her eagerly, not without a break in his voice, how near Landor got to it with *Rose Aylmer* and other enchanting strains. Here and there she got a perfumed snatch of the rightful Hippocrene: Plato's *Stargazer* for one,

and that noble compliment of a nameless lover, i. xliv.—

> Sweet flowers for thee, my fragrant one,
> The grace is theirs, not thine.
> Fragrance from thee makes fragrant them,
> As from thine eyes they shine.

A paraphrase at the best. But he avoided their lovers' cries, and kept himself to their prayers. Here, it must be owned, he was not so ingenuous as he might have been. In their voices he praised his own Hymnia; Artemis of the Haven was by his side, touching him as he read; Artemis of the Ways walked them with him. He had as many names for her as a Catholic for the Virgin Mary, and could justify them all out of the poets.

As to these, and their near relation to herself, Sanchia was obtuse. But she got some fragrant snatches from that nosegay of poets, and I think a hazy kind of suspicion that a heathen Goddess, to a heathen, meant a good deal more than a pretty woman rather undressed.

And thus the day came when Mrs. Percival summoned her to Great Cumberland Place, and lessons in art were feverish, and readings in the poets suffered lapse; and whole quarters of hours passed with silence fallen upon the pair; and a last sonnet to Hymnia was penned and recited; and then an early morning hour struck when she stole out alone through the dewy woodlands to bid her friend good-bye.

CHAPTER VI

HOW HE WENT HIS WAY

In Gorston Thicket, among the glancing shafts of young oaks, by the pool where first he had loved her body's beauty, they stood to their farewells. They were simple, and he dared to make them so. For the first few minutes they were vowed silently. The friends stood side by side: he had her hand, she all his heart.

The lilies now starred the black water like a galaxy. "They have all opened their eyes wide for the last of you," he said.

Her smile was rather rueful. "No, it's for you. You are the first to go. Perhaps I shall see them again."

"Shall you? I wonder! I shall think of you here."

She accepted that as a matter of course. "Yes, think of me here. I shall come once more."

He gave a flick to the idea—turned it lightly aside so that it shouldn't hit either of them as it flew. "You will? Then that's a bargain. You shall come for me and say a prayer to the Nymphs. You believe in the Nymphs now, don't you?"

She had vague eyes, seeing but not seeing. "Yes,

I think I believe in them. It's difficult to help it —as you explain them."

He looked about the woodland. "Here and now one might believe anything. Personally, I believe everything."

This she accepted. "I know you do. I begin to understand it. I'm sure I believe more than I did."

Now he looked at her like a teacher. "Take it from me. You can't believe too much. The utmost stretch of your believing could not hold a fragment of the truth. This world is almost inexhaustible, small as it is: but the wrappings of it, the *entourage*"—he stretched out his arms wide—"boundless!—incomprehensible!" He stopped, watching her until she thrilled a response. "Yet here we are," he went on, "you and I—alone in it. 'You and I, sphered in solitude'—adventuring in, to see what we may light upon. Oh, my dear, it's a wonderful pilgrimage. I can never get over that feeling—of inexhaustible adventure, of extreme possibility: that we may learn a truth—at any moment—see it flash out, white, blinding—and there we are, rewarded, fed, drunken, and ready to begin again."

A shy, grateful glance rewarded him indeed, the flutter of an answering smile, and her hand that gave thanks for his, and nestled. "It's very wonderful," she said; "it makes my heart beat. And it's perfectly true. But——"

"Well, my dear? Well——?"

"I feel it now, you know. I'm quite, quite

sure." A blue beam from her eyes pierced him. "That's because of you. But I'm going home—to London—and——" Her high-arched brows revealed the bleak prospect, but he could not admit it bleak.

"London," he told her, "is the most romantic place in the world. I don't know anything like it for stimulating the sense. Think of those miles of shut doors, blank windows! Think of what may be behind any one of them—what prayers, what watching for a sign, what love, what speechless misery, what beginnings, what endings! Oh, no, no, Sanchia! you'll never faint in London."

She was very doubtful as she thought of Great Cumberland Place and its mahogany and red-flock papering, and Fraülein Winkiewicz, that stored and costive Hungarian. But she took courage from his fire. "I shall try to look at it properly. I shall go on with my sketching—in Kensington Gardens, perhaps."

He nodded quickly, smiling. "That's a great place—full of magic. You'll see things there—and may believe what you see. Pan and the Nymphs—and fairies like wise children."

She leaned to him, looking away over the pool. "Will you write to me?"

He laughed. "What do you think? What else shall I do, do you suppose?" And then she looked at him, and made his heart go faster.

"Don't tease me. I know you will." He let go her hand—it had become very necessary.

"I'll bore you to death with my sermons," he said briskly.

The great light that suddenly throbbed and filled the wood, and the warmth that followed fast, made them both look up. Upon the blue the oak-crowns now were burning gold. Senhouse bowed his head. "The sun is up," he said.

She bathed her face in the new day; she was very serious. "Is this the end—or the beginning?"

"For me it's the beginning," said Senhouse. "I think you'd better go to church." His heart was wailing for her; he could hardly keep himself in hand.

She looked at him. "Shall I go to church?"

He nodded shortly. "Yes. Go to church. Pray for the pair of us. I can't come with you this time, but the better part of me will be there." Then he took her lax hand up and kissed the fingers of it.

"Good-bye, Queen Mab. The Gods bless us both."

Her eyes were wide and scared. Her lips were pale. "I shall ask them to," she said. "Good-bye." She turned and walked quickly through the woodland, holding up her white skirt in her hand. She never looked back.

When she was out of sight, Senhouse lifted up his clenched right hand. "O God, never leave her—this young Saint of Yours!" Thus he made his prayer. Then, manlike, he swore. "I suppose I'm a damned fool. I love her utterly. She's straight out of Heaven—drifted upon me like a snowflake. And gone!—to her fate!"

For a time he stood, staring into the pool. There, black and lucent, charged with its memories, it lay; but he had not the courage to call them up. He knew what madness lurked behind such an act, and left the dangerous place. Reaching his piled-up cart and patient beast, he heard the scouring of hoofs at a gallop, and laughed. "Thank the Lord, here comes my tonic."

Two ponies at a stretch, two white-jersied riders, two windmill arms, and then—"Hulloa, old Jack! Here we are!" They were almost upon him, and pulled up with a showering of grit.

The Dowser claimed it. "By a head, Percy—you *are* a rotten rider. Now you owe me half-a-crown, and you'll jolly well pay up."

"It was a dead heat, of course." Percy was flushed and indignant. "Ask Jack. Jack, it was a dead heat, wasn't it? Or did I really win?" He looked at his brother with reproof. "I believe I did, you know. That's why you claimed it first."

"Oh, what a sickening lie! Chaps get flogged for that. Don't they, Jack? It's rank form to get licked and not take it. Any kid knows that—except you."

Tonic for your left lovers! Senhouse gulped it down, and felt the better for it. "Shut up, you two, and escort me to the milestone. Of course it was neck and neck. Now, gentlemen, please—in skirmishing order. Percy goes on ahead and looks out for the enemy. The convoy follows,

and Dowser takes the rear. The enemy is very active, gentlemen. Eyes skinned, I beg of you."

The boys were instantly pioneers. I wish I could exhibit the infinite solemnity, the mature cunning with which Percy made this confidence. "I think I ought to tell you, Captain Senhouse, that I believe I saw one of them as we joined you. She was in white—and in that direction. And she was retreating, having made observations."

"It was only Sanchia, you ass!" cried Dowser. "Going to church, of course."

"Oh, I know that quite well. Thanks awfully. She was going to pray for our capture, of course."

"I don't think she need do that, somehow," said Senhouse drily. Then he woke up. "Now, gentlemen, for the honour of the flag; for Queen and Country; for England, Home, and Beauty—Eyes front! Forward!"

Dowser reined up and saluted, stiff as a rod; Percy spurred forward, craning his neck; Senhouse took his seat on the tilt-cart shaft, and the convoy moved on.

The great game was played out to the very limits of the enemy's country, which was agreed to end at the second milestone. That would give them just time to get back to breakfast, but only just. "Those silly old Paddle-boats are still there, you see," Percy had explained, condoning his apparent want of heart. He referred to the Marquis and Marchioness of Badlesmere, his uncle and aunt by the mother's side. Therefore, at the second milestone, they de-

parted with many a whoop of defiance, and Senhouse took up his journey the better for their rough music.

He was happy, but sentimental—able to laugh at himself and glory in his folly at the same time. He rolled a cigarette and looked it over, whistling softly. Then he smiled on one side of his face. "Now to please her—" and he threw it into the ditch. "God bless her! Oh, Heaven, how exquisite she is!" But he could triumph in her now; he was himself again. She was indeed a Revelation: so steady a judgment, so confident, and so young! That she was beautiful, and looked delicate, and was not so, but added to the marvel she made up. A woman—a girl—may be as lovely as a shell, and as empty: it's when she informs a lovely mind that she becomes a miracle. Sanchia had made a seer of him. He passed men and women, wayfarers on the road, and nodded back their greetings, and was compassionate. "You poor, poor devil, who go bent-backed to your work, and don't know Sanchia, the wonder of the world!" A young butcher and his lass drove briskly by, handfasted in a cart. "Ah, you lucky couple, well for you that you haven't met with her! You'd give it up in despair." It is to be noted of him, as a constant characteristic, that he was most flippant when his heart was bleeding. In all his eloquence—if he was really serious—he reached a point where he stopped dead, as if conscious of the futility of utterance, and turned himself off with a half-jest.

Anemones in a woody hollow caught his eye, and he stopped his horse, and descended to pay them his vows. They gleamed up from their dark lacery of leaves. Her toes had been that colour—rose and white—when she had drawn them fresh from the water. Often and often he had wondered at them, for she loved to bathe her feet. Water seemed always irresistible to Sanchia; she seemed to smell it out. That was natural. Artemis haunted streams and rushy pools. She was the Lady of the Lake. Lovely, pure, glowing, starry flowers! They were hers by right, for, like them, she was pale and fragile and shy—and yet very strong, and could be bold when need was. And she was a Saint. She left him to bow her head in a church. He shut his eyes and could see her kneeling there, or looking up at the Cross and candles over the altar. She had prayed for him while he was larking with the boys! God bless her always, anyhow!

After all, he was dignified above all men, in that he alone could see what she was. Let him not forget that. She went her ways among them and their womenkind; she was Sanchia Percival, or Sanchia, and not one of them knew what more she was, or what lay shrouded, glowing under the veil, but only he—he, Senhouse, who hadn't sixpence to his name, and chose to sleep under a hedge. This made him a great swell; he could not but acknowledge that to himself. In one flash, when she had stood in her white gown by the pool, he

had "discerned the God." That was a point in his favour; that lifted him out of the ordinary run; and he felt that he could go about his business the better for it. He was pretty sure that he would paint the better, write the better, teach the world of slaves the better what dogs' lives they chose to lead.

But—ah, the world was empty! His heart ached; there was wailing in his ears. He was alone, should not see her till who knew when. And every shuffle forward of Rosinante took him farther from his glory and his stay. He had to smoke a pipe over this, and talk with a couple of hedgers at their dinner in a ditch. "Mr. John," they called him, knowing him or his equipage by repute. With them he munched his bread and cheese, and shared his ale, while he discussed his whereabouts and his whitherwards. He had nowhere in particular to go; he was even less hampered than usual, for you don't plant in May, but look rather to reap. The Hunstanton road forked off, they told him, a mile or so on, and he quickly chose for the sea, since Artemis haunts the water. There would be a waft of her there; that shiver of the little waves, that cloud on the still surface, would hint at her silent flitting. He explained this to his friends, who nodded sagely, with a "So I've heard say," assuming the Goddess to be a kind of water-fowl. "It's not so much a bird, you know, as an Influence," he insisted. One of the hedgers shifted his quid of cheese and jerked his head. "You might put it at that, sir, and not be much out."

It was a long road to the shore; he did not get there until close upon midnight, having no sense whatever of time. There, finally, he sat brooding over the curtained water under the stars, musing upon vacancy, all the singing out of him, "he and his pain together."

He had no desire to sleep, nor once considered the possibility, but sat on, knees to chest, chin upon them. His bony fingers clasped his shins, his burning eyes were fixed upon a point of light far out at sea. If he thought, he knew not his thought; if he suffered, was unconscious of it. But when the first shore bird called startlingly the warning, and he saw the faint stirrings of light in the east, he found himself wrangling out his reasons for the life he led—putting them before her, justifying himself. She, the sister of Apollo, like Apollo, was "cloistered for a reason"; but here was he adrift, shut out by his own choice from the strongholds of men. His brain fired and became feverishly alive; he knew that he was eloquent, was certain he could get her sympathies. His need was burning; he must have her on his side. His world was empty indeed if her slim figure came not to fill it.

With the first light he wrote her his first letter.

CHAPTER VII

THE RETURN TO GREAT CUMBERLAND PLACE

SADDLED horses were at the door when the brougham arrived, bringing Sanchia home. Miss Melusine and Miss Victoria were about to ride, it was told. Down the stair they came, habited, booted, hatted, and gloved proper. Vicky's "Hulloa, Sancie, we're off," and Melusine's "Darling, how sweet to have you back," were also proper, in the herald's way of speaking. Vicky's had gladness behind the bare words, and Melusine's meant nothing at all. But they were very charming, and she looked lovely in her habit—like a swan.

Vicky lingered in the hall to whisper, "Thank Heaven, Pintail isn't coming. He's talking to Hawise about his family. Look out, they're in the drawing-room. Mamma's in the morning-room, writing letters, of course." Then she looked sharply at her little sister, "Did you have a good time?"

Sanchia's answering beam was guarded. "Awfully good," she said. "I really learned something."

"So did we," said Vicky—but Sanchia never blenched—"from mamma. You had a marquis there! And a Lord William! Really, very swagger."

Sanchia denied them. "They weren't with us at all. They were nearly two miles off. You had to get to them through woods. And I only saw them once; and all the marchioness said to me was, 'What perfect weather.'"

"But Lord William," Vicky persisted. "Mamma said that he was greatly struck. I thought it was a clear case."

Sanchia's lip curled back, in the Greek fashion. "He's over forty, and blinks for three minutes before he speaks. It's a new way of stammering. But he's quite a nice man."

Vicky paused, then flashed: "Who was your favourite man?"

And then Melusine intervened with, "Darling, shall we put off our ride? Wouldn't you rather?"

And what else could have been at once so charming and so effective? Vicky postponed her probings.

The morning-room revealed Mrs. Percival's industrious back and the vigorous squeaking of her quill. It was not her habit to unbend to either of her younger daughters. Philippa, Mrs. Tompsett-King, was attended to because she had a way of compelling attention; Hawise was to marry a baronet; Melusine was the beloved: for the other two, discipline must be maintained, the fine austerity of a Christian home. But at Sanchia's near approach, and "Here I am, mamma," the busy matron did look up, and on the glowing cheek bestowed a peck which told of a very cold nose, and seemed to give

the lie to her, "Well, my darling, welcome home!" Slowly, then, Mrs. Percival wiped her pen and laid it in its appointed place; she seemed deliberately to prepare herself to be interested. Sanchia, seated beside the escritoire, yielded her hand to her mother's pair, without enthusiasm. Her smile, poor child, was perfunctory, and if her eyes showed confident, why, they told fibs.

And how was dear Lady Mauleverer? Mrs. Percival must be told. "And Grace, dear, cheerful Grace?" Sanchia must write a grateful letter. It would be well to catch the five o'clock post. Mrs. Percival herself would add a line if she might be allowed. She loved all who loved her children. It must have been agreeable at Gorston; the gardens were famous; the Gorston orchids had a *cachet* all their own. To meet such people as Lord and Lady Badlesmere was a privilege; and the church, Mrs. Percival understood, lay within the park. And good, sound church teaching; a daily Eucharist! Excellent, indeed. Lord William Botetort must have been delightful. He had helped Sanchia with her sketching? No? Oh, that had been Mr. Senhouse! Who was staying in the neighbourhood? Lord William was, of course, Lord Badlesmere's brother, and brother-in-law, consequently, of Mr. Charnock. Lady Alexandra had been a very earnest churchwoman. Mrs. Percival had met her once or twice on a Committee of the M.A.B.Y.S. The *Maybys*, we call it.

After this, as upon a flood long pent up, but now

irresistible, came home confidences. "Sir George is here—up for a Railway Bill—and is *charming*. Oh, *charming*! Chivalrous to a fault; it is a privilege to converse with him. He dined with us last night. Philippa and Septimus came, and that young Mr. Chevenix: no one else. That rather difficult Mr. Etherington, your father's old friend, came in after dinner. Rather against my judgment—but, however—Philippa quite lost her heart to Sir George. 'One of our Conquerors,' he may well be called. She dubbed him that as she left us last night: you know her way. 'But you, dear lady, have led captivity captive,' he said. He kissed her hand. Our Hawise is overflowing with happiness. They are in the drawing-room."

Sanchia's plain way with such monologue was perhaps too chilling. She swallowed it whole—like a grey powder. Her mother occasionally had to complain of her irresponsiveness. It was the child's only weapon of defence against *ennui*, and against the seed of something more serious which she could now and again detect in her own heart. Was this sort of thing—could it be—quackery? Horrible doubt; unanswerable by a pious child. She was still baby enough to nourish the belief that her parents were above criticism; at any rate, she dreaded the impiety, and shirked the time when criticism must be applied. Therefore what else could she do but hear and not understand, see and refuse to believe? Vicky—two years older—in her brisk tones said dreadful things about mamma. She had said once

that mamma loved two things in the world more than all the others—*the* Lord, and *a* lord. Sanchia remembered now the surging heat that enwrapped her at that saying. Her cheeks had felt scalding. But Vicky never could resist a joke.

Her father's six o'clock greeting, "Well, my puss, well, my dear one—well, well, well!" his hug and kisses, made amends for early chills, the shiver of isolation felt by a stranded little divinity. A happy hour succeeded—in his smoking-room—on his cushioned, satisfactory knees, and wreathed in the blue spirals of his cigar. "Now, my darling—*all* about it," was the invitation, and she told him more than she could tell to anybody else. In her charmed relation Lord William never showed his noble head, Lord and Lady Badlesmere were not. But there was much of Percy and the Dowser, and much of Mr. Senhouse. "He's very extraordinary, you know, papa; I think perhaps you would say he was too extraordinary. I don't know. I've thought a great deal about it. The tent, you know, and the cart. It sounds the only possible way of living when he talks about it; but—his people are quite rich. His father has a coal mine somewhere; he always calls him 'the Alderman' or the 'dear old coal merchant.' But he's very fond of his father, I can see."

"I like him for that, Sancie. I've got a weakness for that sort of thing." Mr. Percival stroked her hair, and she lifted up her head and kissed him. "But what the deuce does he live in a tent for?"

"He says, you see, that four walls strangle him, and——"

"Yes, yes, chicken," Mr. Percival put in, "but a tent's got walls, I suppose."

"Yes, but you can pull them down in a second, and pack them in your cart, and be somewhere new every night."

"God bless me!" from Mr. Percival; "that would never suit me."

"Yes, it would, you see, because he says that the great thing to avoid in this life is *roots*."

Mr. Percival was dazed. "Roots, my love?" he asked faintly.

"He calls it hamper sometimes. He says, there's top hamper and bottom hamper, and that he doesn't know which is worse—to be clogged about the head or the feet. I do see what he means, but——"

"There's a deal of 'but' about your Mr. Senhouse, darling," said Mr. Percival; "but I like him for liking his father. That must be Senhouse of Dingeley Main. Coal merchant indeed! God bless my soul, I wish I could be that sort of a coal merchant. It's every penny of ten thousand a year. I don't think your friend will have to live in a tent by and by, Sancie."

"Oh, yes, he will, papa. He hasn't had any money from his father for ten years, and never will. He lives on five shillings a week—and earns it."

"Then he's a confounded fool, my dear," said Mr. Percival with confidence.

"He's the cleverest person I ever met," Sanchia

returned, "and the kindest. You can say anything to him—or nothing—and he understands. You mustn't abuse him, dear one. You don't know how he helped me. I think he's perfectly splendid."

It didn't take much to capture papa. He was so easy that it was hardly fair. He caught her round the waist and clasped her close. "My little girl, I'll love him if you ask me to! I do love him for loving my Sancie."

"I don't want you to love him, of course," she told him, snuggled in his whiskers, "and I don't think he does love me. But he's simply the kindest and wisest person I ever met in my life."

"Kindest! Wisest! Oho!" said Mr. Percival, pinching her ear. "And where do I come in at that rate?"

"Dearest, you don't want to come in," said Miss Sanchia; "you're there already."

Vicky's brisk entry, dressed for dinner, put an end to confidences. "Hulloa, papa," she said. "You dear old thing, you'll be late for Pintail. He's coming to dinner again—to talk about his family. Isn't it awful?"

"My dear," said Mr. Percival, "after all, he's Hawise's affair."

"Hawise," said Vicky, "is like a jelly-fish. Plodged against his waistcoat. I don't believe she likes him a bit. She sticks there by inertia, because she was put there. Sancie will hate him."

Sanchia lifted her brows. "You seem to think I've never seen the man. Of course I have. He

thought I was twelve and gave me a skipping-rope. It might have been a doll. I don't hate him at all. I thought he was rather dreary; but I assure you he doesn't exist—for me."

"He doesn't want to," said Vicky. "He exists for himself."

"Tut! you monkeys." Mr. Percival was beating ash from his waistcoat. "I wonder you're not ashamed of yourselves. He's a man of title and a gentleman, and your mother esteems him. That ought to be enough for the likes of you."

"He's mamma's third baronet," Vicky began; but Mr. Percival was loyal.

"Ducky," he said, with a hand on Vicky's shoulder, "don't talk like that. It won't do, my dear. It don't sound very pretty."

Vicky was hushed. "I know it doesn't, papa—but I can't help it."

"Oh, but we must, you know, we must indeed. Now I must get into my swallow-tails." With that he went, and Vicky admitted that papa was an angel. Sanchia said nothing. What was the use? Of course he was an angel. But mamma—after Lady Mauleverer! And Sir George—after Jack! And, oh—after Gorston Thicket, Great Cumberland Place!

In the drawing-room Sir George Pinwell offered her a nerveless hand, and a How-d'ye-do which was directed to some remote corner of the room. He neither saw her nor waited for her reply, but turned with a deferential droop of the shoulders to what

Mrs. Percival had been saying about the Bishop of ——. He was a tall young man, with a round, pink face, pale eyes set *à fleur de tête*, and an extremely high-bridged, pointed nose. His moustache was like a blonde cascade. He was apt to close his eyes when he talked, and allow his eyelids to flicker over them as if contact hurt them. In manner he was bland; he never contradicted anything, but let it pass unchallenged, as deplorable in taste. His opinions, when he pronounced them, were grounded upon taste, and were intended to be final. The gentle Hawise seldom spoke to him, but occasionally glanced up, with the softest, bluest eyes you ever saw in your life.

He did talk, there's no doubt, about his family. "Then, of course, there was Sir Marmaduke; I ought not to pass him by. We like Sir Marmaduke —we have a little *cultus*——"

Vicky asked, "What's a little cultus, George?" from across the table; and he winced.

"A little private worship, shall I say? A little veneration——" His eyelids seemed most painful.

"That's like the Japanese, isn't it?" Vicky said to Sanchia. "*They* worship their ancestors. I think it's a jolly religion."

"You know the Badlesmeres, George, of course," Mrs. Percival said bravely, meaning to break fresh ground. "Sanchia's been seeing something of them at Gorston."

Sir George lifted his head, shut his eyes, and put a finger between the points of his collar. "Badles-

mere I certainly know. Lady Badlesmere—I think —not quite so well. I was at school with Badlesmere —and another of them. I almost forget."

"It may have been Lord William—who was another of Sanchia's neighbours," said Mrs. Percival.

Sir George flickered, then bowed. "Thank you. It was. William Botetort." And Vicky nudged Sanchia, and whispered, "There's a *nuance* for you." She really was rather dreadful.

He returned to his family, for Hawise's advantage. "Sir Marmaduke, you must know, fought for his King at Naseby. It was—finely, I think—said of him, upon one occasion——"

And, seeing him now in secure possession of two families, we may leave him expounding.

CHAPTER VIII

VOICE FROM THE OPEN IN JUSTIFICATION

SHE got her letter before she left Gorston. It had been in her pocket when she reached home, and had often been read. She had not yet answered it, however, and did not in fact answer it for a week. She was always so reticent, even to herself, and so discreet that one doesn't know how she took it. Signs of hurt are visible in it to the experienced eye. The pleasure he takes, for instance, in the use of her name—that's one. Another is his plain anxiety to prove to her his unconcern. Here, anyhow, it is for the interested reader to judge.

12th May.

I am thirty miles away from you, Sanchia, encamped upon the edge of a glimmering marsh, awaiting dawn to take up my bearings. All about me the shore birds are piping their wild, sad music; most melodious of them all, the curlew; how I love that bird! You never heard the little owls, did you, at San Gimignano: plaintive trebles fretting to each other in the night? They are said to be the souls of two murdered lads, Rossellino and Primerano by name. I am sure Pythagoras was right concerning wild-fowl, and that the soul of my grand-dam may

fitly inhabit a bird. I forget whose moan the Greeks heard in the curlew's cry: some robbed young life's, no doubt. But I wander.

I wish to report, Sanchia, please, that I have travelled since I left you at daybreak (yesterday), with a long rest at noon, and am now going to bed in my sack, for it's too dark yet, and I'm too sleepy, to pitch a tent. Besides, it's close and steamy. I think that I can smell the rain, as, saving your presence (but I know you'll laugh), I have the knack of doing. Perhaps you'll remember, please, that I did it on the day of the Oulton picnic; and who turned up a nose, and left a cloak behind, and would have got a wet skin if it hadn't been for a masterful Anarchist and his jacket? Saint Martin was beat that time; for *he* divided his jacket, whereas—so there's for you, pert maid.

Percy and the Dowser came pelting after me, and took me on to the second milestone. We played Pioneers through the enemy's country. Percy reported you as having been seen on the way to church. Keen as mustard, they were, to the very end. Did you meet either of them, I wonder? No—of course you didn't. You went home through the woods, like a respectable Dryad, I know.

I meant to have told you, but had other things to think about, that Charnock, after dinner, had drawn me awfully aside, and, in a whisper which could have been heard from Graseby to Colehampton, as good as said what he thought about me and my deplorable way of life. He's done that before often enough.

This was what he called a "special appeal." He *looked* what an ass he thought me. That I should renounce six hundred a year (to begin with) and a certain share in the colliery for wandering by the hedgerows on what I can pick up! He had no words to voice his thoughts. They lay too deep for tears —or jeers—or swears. He said that Lady Badlesmere had spoken about me; she thought it such a pity. Poor old chap, with his Stake in the County, and Vested Interests, and Seat in Parliament; with his hounds and his horses at break of day, men-servants (all touching their hats), maid-servants (all bobbing), boys at Eton, family pew,—imagine how he chafes. I tell you, I irritate him to madness; he can't stand it. He's fond of me, too, you know, which makes it worse; but he doesn't want to remember that I live. It's a tarnish on his prosperity. It mildews his roses, and blights the hops that make the beer by which he lives and fares softly. If I argue with him, he foams at the mouth. So I laughed at him, and made him give me a cigarette. That soothed him. It had a gold tip, and was very spluttery. You know the kind. Bond Street. He'll be better now I'm gone.

So will you, my lady, perhaps. I think that—once or twice—I scared you; indeed, I know that I did. I've seen it in your eyebrows, and in your eyes too. The grey goes lighter and the iris-rings contract when you're really scared. I don't say that you think me mad; I'll put it that, to you, I'm unaccountable. You think it all rather a pity, and

that it would really be more comfortable if you could be sure of me in a large stone box, with a carriage-drive and entrance-lodge, and a tidy old woman to bend her knees whenever she opens my worship a gate. Hey? Confess, Sanchia, confess. And then my painting should be a gentlemanly amusement, not a livelihood—shouldn't it now? Why should I sell my wits when I've got a rich father and a family coal-mine? Why not put on a black Melton coat and square-topped felt hat, and go to church of a Sunday, like a Christian or an ordinary man? My dear, shall we reason together? Shall we have it out? I've told you all of it before—by fits; but I feel your scare on me now, and can't stand it at a distance.

Every man must seek salvation his own way. That's all I'm doing, upon my honour.

Let's clear the air. What precisely do I mean by salvation, or, for that matter, what do you mean by it? (I'm talking of this world now, remember. Perhaps I'll have a go at your reverence about the other, some day.) Well, I'll tell you. According to me, salvation in this world is the power of using every faculty we have to the full—every available muscle to the highest tension, every ounce of brain to the last drop, every emotion to the piercing and swooning point, every sense to an acuteness so subtle that you are able to feel the hairs on a moth's underwing, separate the tones on a starling's neck, smell, like a hare, the very breath of the corn, see like a seabird, hear like a stag. Those, with respect to Char-

nock and his fellow-pundits at Westminster, or to the Able Editors of Fleet Street, with their telephones to their long ears, and their eyes on the latest intelligence—those are the faculties which God has given us to save ourselves withal. We are to replenish the earth, I believe—but what for? For the earth's advantage? Not at all, but for ours. (Personally, mind you, I don't subscribe at all to the doctrine that we are lords of creation. Why should we be? The little that I know about the beasts, and what I am learning about the plants, suggest to me that they have their salvation to work out by the side of us, and that we can help each other a good deal more than we do at present. I once saw a child playing horses in a garden with a little dog. The dog was the horse, and wore a halter of string over his muzzle; *she* held the reins. They had a great run, and she brought him back to his loose-box, undid the halter, and set him to a wisp or two of hay. If you'll take it from me, he buried his nose in it, and made believe to have his feed. Upon my honour, that's true! All right; then don't tell me that we and the beasts can't help each other any more. But *you* won't, I know. It's old Charnock I'm doubtful about, who blows birds to pieces with a gun.)

That was a digression. I was waiting for you to admit that the full use of our faculties is our way of temporal salvation: to think to the full, reason and remember, to swell or uplift the heart, to walk and run; to learn how to *do* things, make them, use them, delight in them; to be alive in every fibre, and at all

times; to be always alert, always awake, always at the top of perfection, until we are wholesomely and thankfully tired—and then, dear God, to sleep like the dead! If we are things of body, mind, and motion, as you'll allow, that must be salvation. Very well, we agree so far—at least I hope we do; for I give you fair warning, my friend, that in that admission you have placed in my hands a most powerful weapon. And don't you forget it!

Now then. If the use and perfecting of faculty is salvation, liberty to learn is the only way of it. We must be absolutely free, Sanchia. Salvation demands it, our manhood expects it of us. We started, mind you, free enough: all our hamper is of our own making. But we've never been free since we were turned out of Eden in the days before the Flood.

Consider old Charnock, Squire of Graseby—is he free? God pity the poor, he's the veriest shackled slave in this land of slaves. You are all slaves, you know: your sublime Lady Mauleverer (who fancies herself a slave-owner, bless her!); you, my poor dear child, qualifying for your yoke; your respected Parson Twisden (squire and parson by shifts)—all the lot of you, Sanchia, but with a difference. Some of you can't help yourselves. My lady was bought by the late Sir Giles, who was himself a descendant of slaves from the time of the biggest slave of them all, the late William Conqueror; and she was sold by her father to him for thirty (or thirty-two) pieces of an escutcheon and a country-seat thrown in. And she was a good girl in those days, and did as she was

bid—besides, Sir Giles was a fine figure of a man, I hear. You're a slave for the same reasons—goodness and girlhood. Why, you've only just been allowed to put up your hair! And your Reverend Twisden? Well, he put his neck under the yoke of the Church with great intention. It was deliberate; he knew very well what he was doing; I admire him for it. He'd be the first to admit the slavery. Service which is perfect freedom, he'd say. I don't agree with him. According to me, we are all priests for ever after the order of Melchisedek; but I'm a sort of Quaker, you know—a pagan Quaker, or a quaking Pagan, whichever you please. No! I don't agree with him at all. I disapprove of your reverend friend. But I respect him mightily, all the same—and here's his very good health!

But old Roger Charnock, M.P., J.P., D.L.—out upon the hobbled wretch! He's done it himself from the start, and has no one but himself to thank for it. I've seen him at it all along, watched him from the playground to the hulks—the gilded hulks in which he now sweats. Rugby doesn't count, though he was in the Sixth, and a swell. At Cambridge he was a jolly chap (as he is now, confound him!), quite an easy-going, God-bless-you kind of a man, with a taste for prehistoric remains which might easily have developed into a passion. He took a second in history, and was going off to Petersburg to study under Vinogradoff. But what did he do instead? Articled himself to a brewer! and when his father died and left him a thousand or two, what next but he must

buy the brewer out? It was a rotten concern, I believe, and he got it for a song. Well, that was the end of him; he set to work to "build up his fortune." You might put it that he set to work to brick himself up in a great house. God help him now, he was at it from dawn to midnight, slaving and driving slaves. He starved himself, wouldn't look at the pretty girl he was fond of, and who was fond of him too; took no days off, forgot his barrows and tumuli; thought of nothing but beer-shops and how he could rope 'em in: a foreclosure here, an advance there, here a little and there a little; nor did he rest until he had every poor devil within a thirty mile of Graseby under his arrogant old purple thumb. He "got on," as they say; bought land; built little painty villas for his dependents to rent of him; was what they call a just landlord, which means that he abated a man a fiver a year if he saw that by doing so he would get a tenner out of him later on. Then he married into the house of Badlesmere and became one of the Salt of the Earth. Salt! Yes, indeed, an irritant poison.

What did he get? What was his price? I'll tell you. He got a country-house five times too big for any reasonable man, with as many rooms in it as there are days in the month. He could have slept in a new bed every night for three weeks if he had pleased. And that did please him vastly. And he got all the rest of his glories after that. J.P. came next—easily; and they all followed—M.P., D.L., M.F.H. They say he's to be sheriff this year.

There are the Privy Council and a Peerage ahead of old Roger: he's got his eye on 'em. Lord Graseby, eh? Viscount, Earl, Marquis of Graseby, Duke of—— I believe there's only one county left to be duke of, and that Flint. Duke of Flint—and well named, for a man petrified at the heart. Wicked old Roger, whom I protest I still love, for all I chasten him.

Now, do you see how the fellow's tied himself up—like one of his own beer-shops? He has tied up his morals absolutely. I don't mean in the cheap sense that he can't live in splendour and ease unless people get drunk. That's true, but refers to the vulgar notion of morals, as meaning good morals. (Morality doesn't mean good morals at all. It means customs. Very bad customs may be very good morals to some nations, and t'other way about. The only really good morality, common to all people, consists in being true to yourself.) But I mean that he can't follow his own bent. He can't have a single motion of the mind unless public opinion backs him up. Hopeless! Can he punch a man's head? Of course not: he'd be liable to appear before his own bench. And he's chairman! Can he lie down under a hedge on a starry night in summer and sleep beneath the stars? An excellent custom, according to me, but, bless you, the scandal! Can he walk down Bond Street on a July noon with his coat off? Not without a crowd at his heels, and *I've* done it half-a-dozen times. Can he delve? There's forty stalwart gardening men to know the reason why. Can

he pass the time of day with a railway-guard, 'bus-conductor, crossing-sweeper, gipsy-woman, all first-rate authorities in their own arts? Not without an apparatus of curtseyings, forelock-pullings, tip-expectations, moppings and mowings which smother his manhood up in a silly halo, pulled from the backs of the might-be honest creatures he's with. Upon my soul, Sanchia, did you ever dream of such wretchedness as this? Cribbed, cabined, confined—why, if the man plays golf, he must have another at his heels to carry his toys about! Why, if the man's hungry, he must wait until two others have put on plush breeches and brass-buttoned coats, and spread the table, and called in Tomkins (the flap-cheeked, elephant-eared Tomkins) to approve, and to tell him heavily, "Luncheon is served, sir."

And then he'll have one tall fellow to fill his plate, and another to take it away again; and neither of them, for their lives, will dare give him anything to drink when he's athirst, because, if they did, Tomkins would be drawing a hundred and fifty a year and nothing to show for it. Oh, wretched, wretched, hobbled, crippled, groping old Charnock! *Now* do you see why I have renounced my patrimony, and live at my ease, as my wits choose? *Now* do you think me a madman? I vow to you, Queen Mab, I think myself the second wisest man on earth. The first wisest has been dead some years. His name was Diogenes; and he was neither M.P., J.P., nor D.L. Nor did he marry into the house of Badlesmere.

But he's happy, the old sand-blind rascal, you'll tell me. I reply, of course the fellow's *snug*; and as he has a superficies (the only thing left him which he shares with me, I suppose), when you stroke him he's pleased. His hunters and hounds stroke him, no doubt; caps off from the lads, bobs from the lasses, stroke him. There's a lot of pretty tickling done when a great policeman holds up the traffic from Victoria to Westminster Bridge, in order that Charnock, M.P., may walk unhindered to the House. Oh, yes, if you tickle him, he can still purr, I grant you. If that's happiness, he's happy.

He tickles himself too, or gets his haberdasher to tickle him. I was watching him the other day when we were all there. You remember how you and I got sick of the golfing talk and went off over the lake, and pretended we were lost? Well, before we broke loose, after luncheon, on the terrace, I was watching the old chap, with his fat cigar well alight, and his coffee and old brandy (which are very bad for his liver, and he knows it) at his elbow. I wonder if you saw it all: I did—in a flash. There he sat, you know, quite the prosperous, clean Englishman—a great buck in his way—in his good clothes, neatest boots, *point device* all over, absolutely nothing wrong. His blue flannels! His small black satin tie under the flawless collar; the pearl pin; the brown shoes! Exquisite cut, those shoes, brogued, and with a surface like old lacquer. His valet, he tells me, is worth his weight in paper. Superb, prosperous creature; tickling himself, and purring hard. It

was his silk sock which was the crowning touch to his happiness: I saw that—in a flash. Cornflower blue, you may have noticed, with little gold threads meandering up his calf. It fitted like a skin, showed off his wicked old ankle to a nicety. The high light came on the bone and gleamed like a satiny rose-petal. Neatness, daintiness itself! Strokable! You couldn't help stroking it. I wanted to, myself. That was his purring-point.

I saw him watch it, turn his foot about to catch the light; then he pulled deeply at his cigar, sighed his contentment, crossed his leg, and clasped that jolly ankle—and purred and purred! No trace of vulgar snobbery, mind. He didn't want any one else to admire or envy. He's not low—not a bit. No. He liked it to be there, to be sure of its perfectness, to feel that it was all of a piece with the rest of him—with Bill Hill, with Grosvenor Gardens, the House of Commons, with the horses in the loose-boxes, and the great landau and silver-harnessed pair of browns. It was a finishing-touch, a corner-stone, bless him! So let us sing, Happy, happy, happy Charnock! He's got his reward—worked hard and ta'en his wages. Now let him order his tomb in St. Praxed's Church and his life's work's done! No, no! I forgot the peerage.

Esau, being hungry as a hunter, sold his birth-right for porridge. The thing was done in a minute; he yielded to the passion of hunger, and was none the worse, because a full meal doesn't root you for

ever to the glebe. And his birthright—flocks and herds and wives, mostly—was, if he had only known it, a birth-wrong. He was really well out of it. But Roger, if you'll forgive a vile pun, has bartered his manhood for *purrage*—for a landau and pair, and the rest; the girl he loved (such a nice girl too) for a daughter of the house of Badlesmere, and the rest of *that*; the teaching of his own sons for a deer-park and pack of hounds; and his digestion for a great table, three men-servants, and a French cook with a temper. He had a brain, and has condescended it to low cunning; he had sinews, and has coated them with lard. He might have climbed the heights, and he gets carried up in a landau. He might have made his boys his friends; but he sends 'em to Eton, and teaches 'em to look on him as a paymaster. He can do nothing whatever that he has a mind to unless he can coax his neighbours to admire him for doing it; and the moment they carry their admiration to the point of copying him, he wants to do something else, and must coax 'em again. And you think I'm a madman for not copying that way of life! You don't, my dear; I won't believe it. I'm an angel of light compared to old Roger. Upon my soul, I'm a superior person, though I've only got three pairs of trousers to my name.

The dawn is here and shames my rage. I ought to thank God that I'm alive and free as air, instead of blaspheming Him for letting other wretches live also. The sun has risen out of the North Sea, and

all the little eager waves of the Wash are on fire at the edges. The air is wondrous mild—as tremulous and close to tears as a convalescent child. I wish—I wish—I wish that one dear child was here to watch the pearly wonder of this dawn with me. No, I don't; I swear I don't. It's not going to last; it will rain before eight o'clock, and I shall be squelching through miry Norfolk on my way to Ely. But while it lasts it's too awfully beautiful for words. A filmy wonder: Aurora, new out of bed, wistful after her dreams. (That's rather pretty.)

I shan't go to bed at all: it's too good. I shall swim in the gilded sea while the coffee is a-making, then paint what I can remember of this astounding glory; and then shove along through the soak to Ely. There ought to be a letter for me there. Address me "care of Mrs. Webster, basket-maker." She lives in a caravan, and smokes a pipe; but she's an honest woman. She shaves twice a week.

Good-bye, Sanchia. Don't think me mad, and remember me in your prayers.

Leagues of marsh-cotton here—exquisite clouds of burnt silver. And samphire—like wet emerald!

Her frugal little answer, when it came from London, brought the tears to his eyes.

CHAPTER IX

VICKY'S CONCLUSIONS, AND THE FACTS

THE Percivals' was a busy household: from old Tom (as his friends had him), lording it in The Poultry, to young Sanchia, with her lover and her opening mysteries, it was a household united only in diversity. Mrs. Percival—for all her bustlings out and in, writings of letters, interviewings of young women with souls to be saved, and of curates very ready to save them; her attendings of committees, her afternoons, and her evening parties—would have been the loudest to cry out upon such an accusation; she would have acclaimed her children's confidence above all things in the world; but the facts are that every one of her children told her exactly what she chose, and that she had, above all women born, the power of deluding herself. Thus she did not, and could not if she would, examine the postman's daily tribute; and yet she believed that every letter came to the house, so to speak, with a halfpenny stamp on it. But this was absurd. Vicky's correspondence, for example, was enormous—a pink, blue, Silurian pile stood like a leaning tower by her plate every morning. To see her scan, with splendid indifference, each envelope back and front, consider, put

aside, accept, reject, with pretty finger to pretty chin, open, absorb, read forwards, backwards, across; stifle a laugh, smother a yawn, smile darkly, guffaw openly—was to see a robin on a lawn await the immediate advent of a worm, and act accordingly, feed or reject. Vicky wrote enormously, as she received, and as openly, with a carelessness which was proof against suspicion. Hawise, so far as one knew, heard only from Sir George or some remote first cousin of his with a hyphenated name and address printed in bold black. Melusine had many foreign correspondents—an Indian Civil Servant was known to be one, and a ne'er-do-well in Colorado with one lung was another. There had been an Italian dramatic poet, but he had married and gone into an insurance office. That dream was over. Sanchia's post was never very large—but then she was the baby, as it were, and had not, so far, many friends. One or two school-mates kept her up—Grace Mauleverer, of course—twice a year she heard from one of the Charnock boys, chiefly asking for postage-stamps; once in a blue moon she got a letter which made Vicky look sideways from her immense affair, and shut considering eyes for two minutes; but that was all. One gathers that her time was to come. Now, here came bulky envelopes every few days, and the question of the moment was, Had it come? "Had it, by Jove?" Miss Vicky asked herself, for she was nothing if not free of speech.

If there was little confidence between mother and daughter, there was little more between sister and

sister. Each had a character of her own, and each chose to deploy it in her own way in face of the advancing world. To each her own affairs were of absorbing interest, her own pursuit of the hour was the Law of Being. Outwardly they were affectionate, overflowing, unreserved; yet it was a matter of strict etiquette with every one of them, from the incisive, married Philippa downwards, that confidences were in the absolute discretion of the holder, and never to be sought or peered after.

But one couldn't help being interested, of course, and Vicky was highly curious about these letters of Sancie's. They came from the country, it was clear, because they only came in the mornings, and on Mondays by the second post. Most certainly they were from a man: look at the writing. And from a casual sort of man: look how the stamps were stuck on! And yet from a queer sort of man: "Miss Sanchia-Josepha Percival"—Good Heavens! It occurred to Vicky, first, that it was a clergyman, because a clergyman ought to be keen on the name of Joseph. There had been a Saint Joseph, you see —though she (Vicky) would have said that he was the last saint a clergyman ought to have been interested in. Such a peculiar position—but perhaps that was it. She rejected the clergyman theory in favour of a University don, and one sees the devolution of thought. A precise, academic kind of man; and when you came to think of it, Sancie might easily have captured a professor. She was so frightfully serious about things, always wanted to know *why*

things were so. They love that, you know. At any rate, Vicky knew. The don remained in possession for nearly three weeks. Miss Sanchia-Josepha Percival—with a hyphen!—who else could possibly——?

And then came a letter one morning when Sancie, with head bowed over the close writing, chuckled, and laughed outright. The don collapsed like a house of cards. They *never* made jokes. (That is a great mistake, a too hasty generalisation of Vicky's.) A new hypothesis reared itself out of the *débris* of the Fellow of All-Souls (for he had been at that), a shining, burning hypothesis, which held the field. This was a desperate lover, rolling Sancie over the tongue. He was *frightfully* in love, he couldn't have enough of Sancie. He expended himself upon every syllable of her—Miss Sanchia-Josepha Percival—even a hyphen gave him a sensation. Darling little Sancie! How awfully exciting!

Now, who was it? Not an Eton boy, of course, who would put Miss S. Percival, as if her name had been Sarah, like a cook. Besides, he wouldn't write long letters like that. He'd ask for white mice, or talk about a cricket-match and then—"Your affectionate friend Dowser. P.S. You might write to a chap." Vicky knew that kind too. That was absurd.

It was, she finally decided, Lord William Botetort, Sir George's friend William Botetort. It must be, you see, for there was nobody else. Lord Badlesmere was married—not that that made any difference, of course. In fact, they were often the worst.

That was such a bore, because they were no good. You always knew just how far they would go—and then you got a letter to say that they must consider your fair name above all things in the world, and at whatever cost to themselves—and all that. But Vicky somehow was clear that it couldn't be Lord Badlesmere. He hadn't come up enough in conversation. Sancie had never spoken his name unless mamma simply dragged him in by the neck; whereas she had talked about Lord William of her own accord, and had revelled in Sir George's "William Botetort." Vicky had not often seen Sancie so tickled. But of course Sir George was gorgeous. The pity was that Hawise was to be married so soon. One could go to stay with them, but it would never be quite so funny.

It was quite as funny in its way, though, to see Vicky at the moment when her glowing hypothesis shivered and went out. By that time—the middle of June, a week before the Pinwell wedding, which mamma insisted on having in the Portman Chapel—the Portman Chapel!—because it was her parish church (which it wasn't, you know: however, mamma—), by that time the visit to Gorston was ancient history. Events moved quickly in Great Cumberland Place; but Vicky made more than one effort to recall it; and sitting on Sancie's bed one day, when the child was sick and breakfasting there, did succeed. A letter was in Sancie's hand, half read. Here was Vicky's cue. She made a wide cast.

"Sancie, here's the very latest from the breakfast-

room. Mamma has really surpassed herself. Listen. The John Chevenixes ask me to go to Hurlingham with them next Wednesday,—Wednesday week, do you see?" Sanchia, vague-eyed, nodded.

"Don't look so distant, darling. Do attend. Of course I say that I shall go—to papa, mind you, who looks up from his paper, and nods at me, sweet old thing. 'In your best becomes, Vicky, eh?' And then mamma, if you please, mamma puts on a holy expression, a 'For these and all Thy mercies' expression, and says—what do you think? That Thursday is Hawise's wedding day, and that she does think we might be all together the day before. Isn't that a great one? Isn't that as good as George's 'William Botetort'? It's really better, because it's so frightfully crafty."

Sanchia lifted her eyebrows. "I don't think she meant to be crafty. I think she felt like that—at the moment!"

Vicky threw up her hands. "Well, there it is, anyhow. It will be a heavy trial, that Wednesday. Unless George is there, of course. Then we may have some fun." She thought, remembered, and exploded. "William Botetort!" Then she said, "I suppose there really was such a person there. I suppose George didn't fall into a pit. No, no, you're not good enough for that."

"No," said Sanchia, "there really was such a person."

The moment had come. "Was he nice?" asked Vicky; and Sanchia, with that air of divine serious-

ness, of flawless sincerity, crystal-clear, which made her so lovely and so baffling at once, replied calmly, "Yes, he was rather nice. He blinked before he spoke—like a guinea-pig."

And there was the wreck of Lord William Botetort—done with a turn of Sanchia's wrist. Vicky gave it up.

But what Sanchia herself made of these letters of hers must now be considered.

She took them seriously, with a sober elation in the tribute which they certainly were. She took them seriously though they often made her laugh outright, for she had wit enough to see that her friend was most in earnest when he least appeared so. They contained, nearly all of them, highly contentious matter, and she paid them the compliment of examining their propositions with all the brain she could muster. Senhouse treated her absolutely as an equal—when he didn't plainly put her up as his superior. It is to her credit to say—as the fact is—that she was more pleased by the first position assigned her than by the second. To be likened, gravely, to a Greek Goddess puzzled her at first; but it ended by stimulating her to high exertions. Senhouse made no secret of his conviction that she was a reincarnation of Artemis the Chaste and Fair. He wrote of that as of a matter of course—too plain to require elaboration. He never commented upon it, but made it the basis of all his argument. As time went on she partly believed him—I mean that she

quite believed in his seriousness, and did her best to justify it. He told her frankly that to him she was the holiest of women; and she wished to be so. He implied beyond question that she was the loveliest; and she hoped that she was. She went so far as this, that she took thought (much more than she had ever taken before) over her appearance, because he wrote to her that, to him, it was so exquisite. She became—as Vicky said—awfully particular about her gowns, and spent a good deal of time over her hair, and her choice of soaps. Under the spur from him she took immense pains with her sketching, worked hard at it, and aimed for lessons at the Slade School, with a studio, possibly, in the future: why not Paris, indeed? And she read, by his light, much poetry, *belles lettres*, Elia, Hazlitt, Swift; by his advice eschewed Sterne; nibbled at Dante, aspired to the Greek Grammar. So far he did her great good, because she had a mind, which he excited towards exercise.

But he stirred her curiosity too, and perhaps that was not so well. He drew her on to examine institutions which hitherto she had accepted as part of the landscape. It was impossible, for instance, to correspond with a man who called himself an Anarchist without finding out what Anarchists really did desire. And it was difficult to be satisfied on that point without inquiry into papa's bi-annual toast of "The Queen, God bless her," or into his frequent grunt of satisfaction and "Thank your stars, my dear, we've got a House of Lords." As if mamma,

Vicky used to say, wouldn't do that without papa! Sanchia began to read the newspaper for herself about this time, and to puzzle, and to criticise, and to give papa bad quarters of an hour over his before-dinner cigar. Papa used to puff and blow and rub his whiskers. "Well, well, that's all damned fine, my chick—" and then he would withdraw the adjective as most ungentlemanly. "But you see, my love, the country's got to be governed—and if we don't respect the rights of property, where on earth are we?" He would pat her shoulder. "One of these days, when we've got chickens of our own to send out into the world, we shall know more about the rights of property than we do now." Thus papa. But Jack said that there *were* no rights of property, and that, if there were, property was so much bottom-hamper. So Sanchia inquired into the foundations of Society.

Then religion! Mamma, for instance, said that Hawise must be married in her parish church. Well now—must she? Did God expect it of Hawise, or was it the State? And who *was* the State anyhow? And—where was God? A young Sanchia of twenty years, her hair newly put up, and the seriousness upon her of the hush before sunrise—what was she to do, confronted by these questions? What could she do but inquire of her friend his view of God? She did it, with a very sober pen, and with lips pale and compressed. She wrote her letter and dropped it in the pillar-box; and as she walked back to the house promised herself that she would not be swayed

by authority—even Jack's authority. Because, if Jack said that she was Artemis, Jack must mean that she was—what? It was very wonderful.

Senhouse's reply follows. It followed immediately.

CHAPTER X

SENHOUSE ON PAN AND THE NYMPHS

CHANCTONBURY,
A White Morning.

YOUR letter—oh!

Thank you, Sanchia.

The postmistress at Steyning handed it me yestere'en with a smile. "'Tis from a leddy simmingly," quod she. But "Madam," said I, "'tis from *the* lady"—and made her perfectly happy. The moon rose full and orange over the shoulder of Wolstonbury as I broke the seal. Halfway up the borstal road, through the wood, I lit a match and read till I burnt my fingers. When I was at home, snug in the Ring, I read it all. A fair script, Sanchia, guarded, temperate, extraordinarily Greek (for you *are* Greek, you know; your mean is pure gold—whereas I, for all my lore, remain an incurable Romantick. I prefer it with a k). I admire what I can never attain—and so we grow; there's no other way.

I shan't tell you how often I've read it, nor what I've done with it.

Yes, I will, by George, lest you are tempted to vanity. I've burned it with fire. I made one on the lee side of the Ring, out of driftwood and bracken.

They might have seen it from Cissbury, and perhaps they did. I put the document in a match-box, the match-box in a crock, and when you were reduced to fine silky black ash (such a pretty ash burned Sanchia makes—glossy as a top-hat, and her writing a deeper black upon the black) I took you on to the barrow of some dead Briton and scattered you to the four airts. Subtilised essence of Queen Mab now permeates the Weald. Sussex thrills.

Your news is good. I'm glad you are hard at work with your paint-box, and, as you say, learning to do without me. There's a back-handed compliment in that which I like from my only correspondent. Also it shows that we can afford to tell each other the truth, which is a full-faced compliment indeed. When all's said, friendship has nothing to do with greetings and partings—and this island contains us both. You can always find me—if you want to; or I can find *you*, which is the same thing, I believe.

Now to the point—which I like and don't like. I knew you'd be at me one day or another: I've been dreading it, and now it's come. Oh, but I must dedicate myself "to the Maiden of the Country," as Antipater of Sidon called the likes of you once. And it so happens that a recent encounter comes pat to the pen. Listen, then, Sanchia. . . .

I met a fool in the forest—or on the forest fringes, as we may call Ditchling Heath. There, upon the open heath as I lay, he came up and accosted me, tract in hand.

I was frying a mid-day rasher, always a nice business with me. After the customary allusions to the weather, which was perfect, he offered me his tract. The title was *Clean your Dirty Windows*. He called it "my little book," but wasn't the author. He was a fool all the same.

The effect of his tract—for, being very busy, I asked him to give me a digest—was, that you could not see God unless you cleaned your soul's windows. He told me that, and I said, "Of course you can't." He said, "There's more than that in my little book"; and I replied, looking warily up from my frying-pan, "I'm sure there must be, because that's a platitude." I was rather cropped with the man, and like him for not being nettled. He said, "Don't let me interrupt your repast"; and I said that he wouldn't—and would he share it? He declined, but still stood his ground. I had nothing to say—and said it. He didn't seem to be put about.

All was going well, when I was thoughtless enough to pour some of my beer on the ground—a trick of mine, as you know—and to explain it, upon inquiry from him, as a libation to Pan and the Nymphs. Like all dullards, incapable of laughter, he suspected mockery where none assuredly was. He looked at me, raising his eyebrows, and said sickly, "You make a jest of these things?" By Heaven, but he angered me. The arrogant rascal! I fell upon him tooth and claw, spared neither age (for he was no younger than me) nor sex (and he was neuter). I asked him roundly how he dared, as a gentleman and

a scholar, so talk of another religion, and that of such a people? Preposterous in me! But I didn't see why he should have the monopoly of attack. Moreover, I hadn't talked to a living soul for twenty-four hours, and I supposed that his lived.

He tried the high horse, but I pulled him off it, and we fought on foot. "Pray," said he, "do you presume to declare yourself seriously an acceptor of Greek mythology?" Ass that he was! But I had to answer him according to his asininity. I observed that he was forsaking the point of quarrel, which had concerned my challenge of his temerity, not his of mine. His had asked, Did I jest about religion? I put it to him that he ought to see the futility of his question by the way I had framed mine. "If you, good sir," I said, "are troubled with the possibility of my worship of Pan and the Nymphs, why should you resent it if I deplore yours of Whomsoever it may be?" I went on to assure him that I didn't deplore it at all, but hinted that there were many millions in this world of thinking men who would and did; and that some had gone to the bonfire and others had drawn the sword solely because they deplored it. I added that, as a matter of statistics, the majority of his fellow-subjects in this empire deplored it profoundly. We parted, I may tell you, better friends.

I said too much and talked like a prig, I know —your letter, Sanchia, and the holy influences of this place reprove me; but I loathe your glib precisian like poison, and he angered me. For that matter, the most intolerant man I ever knew, without excep-

tion, was an uncle of mine, one Simon Battersby, Esq., explicitly a Free Thinker. His glory was in his freedom from dogma, and yet the old man was bound and gagged by one. His dogma was, that it was wicked to go to church; and if any one belonging to him did it, he was morally shocked. The end of him was this. All his children went High Church, and one a Roman Catholic priest. He cut them, one by one, out of his will; refused them, one by one, his hospitality. Poor, horrible old galley-hand! Another yoked slave for you to add to your collection.

I don't go to church often myself—unless I creep in by your skirts—because I can't be so aware of high God within four walls as I can out of doors; yet I am very capable of believing that a common symbol of moral direction and a common focussing-point for the emotions are valuable things. I'll go as far as that with their reverences. Take the roof off your church or knock a wall down and I'm with you directly. The God for me is old Terminus, a Roman God. He alone of many, when the whole Latin hierarchy were asked whether they would resign their altars in favour of a new-comer, one Jove, said that he would not. He was, you must know, a three-cornered old post, who stood in the Forum and served as a boundary. This made him extremely important. So they had to give him an altar in the Temple of Capitoline Jove, and as he insisted that he could only be worshipped in the open air, were forced to leave a hole in the roof for him. That's why the Pantheon is open to the sky to this day.

Brave old Terminus! But give me the sky if I am to see God. Wasn't it Wendell Holmes who said that he didn't approve of growing oaks in flower-pots? Wise man—making proverbs, like Polonius. It's by no means that I mind the people—unless they have their best clothes on, which they don't on week-days. I think that a crowd really awed by a Presence is a moving experience; and the emotion is catching. You get that abroad, in Southern France (at the Saintes-Maries, for instance), notably in Russia. Once, in Moscow, I saw an ikon being exhibited to the people: it's done once in a while. The Square was packed, a sea of white faces (the Russians are ghastly white, all like ghosts)—all turned one way. Every eye fixed, every mouth open. The priests came out, a gorgeous, absorbed throng of them; and we all quivered. Then there was a hush like death, while certain juggleries, bowings and signings were doing among them. We all had our eyes intent upon the Thing under a gold veil. The Thing was lifted up, flashed naked for a minute. Every soul there fell prone to the earth, myself included, I can tell you; and the Spirit of God brooded over Moscow for a space of time. Wonderful! If you want that kind of thing, or anything like it, in our country, you must go to the trooping of the colours on the Queen's Birthday. It's all we have left of a national religion —absolutely all. And a fine thing it is.

My own particular, personal thrill, to be got within four walls, comes to me in a Cathedral (which must be Anglican for the purpose), when they are singing

evensong in a shut choir, and there's a handful of people in the nave—a hushed tourist or so, some faithful enthusiast whose day is made for him by such ceremonial, and a sprinkling of holy women—nurses, nuns, or whatever. You hear a mumbled lesson, or guess at it; then there's a pause of preparation and suspense. Then, out of the grey stillness, a boy's young voice goes spearing and trembling up; and you forget all about the shock-headed rogue in his tumbled surplice, and believe for a few blessed moments that he is quiring with the young-eyed cherubim. So he is, and so may *you* be, while you can believe it. And there's the secret out.

A poet said—

> God first made man, and straightway man made God,

and spoke profound truth in his little chirpy paradox. That's why, for me, all religions are true, and each religion false. Each of them *will* exclude all the others—like the jealous Hebrews of old time, or Mahomet with a Koran in one hand and a scimitar in the other for *nous autres*; like our friend of Tarsus, who has much to answer for; yes, my dear, and like the Bradlaughs and Ingersolls of our day, or my spluttering old Uncle Simon, who used to gnash his wicked gums at the church-going bell, and stoke the fires of a Gehenna of his own for the likes of your brave and reverend Parson Twisden, and your own dear obsequious head, bowed in a fair place to a fair emblem of God the Father in God the Son.

I don't know that I ought to talk to you of these

things. I never have yet, you'll allow. Nor would I now if you hadn't asked me. And yet I'm deadly serious over it, and in the vein; and you know that I've too much respect for my own store of Poesy ever to breathe a tarnish on yours. One is so contrived, I think, that one can't hurt a soul without hurting one's own. Shall I go on? In all reverence, I shall.

The indisputable fact, as I take it to be, that every man must make God in his own image assures me that every man also makes Him aright. I am prepared to accept the handiwork of any honest man who goes a-God-making. Others, of whom there aren't so many as you might think, don't count. Every man is honest, and every woman good, when in love; and you can't make a God unless you love him first. When you are in love, Sanchia, as I hope you will be some day (and I there to rejoice in the sight), all the loveliest things you ever dreamed of or have distilled out of the million things you have come up against will go into what you love. For you won't love a man so much as the image you make out of him and yourself; and so surely as you have made your own God, so surely (Heaven be with you!) you will make your lover. All that he will provide will be a peg for you to hang your garlands and fair draperies upon. The fairer your good thoughts, the happier your good experiences, the nobler will he show up for your bedecking of his pegship. He will be your fairest work of art, Sanchia; and unless I'm partial—which is absurd, of course—he ought to be

a very goodly sight. I tell you, I want to see the fellow.

If Religion is not that, then I am an ass. It's pure Poetry, I believe; the best thing you can make, made out of the best things you have collected, and passed through your mind *at its best*. There are such a lot of them too! The flush of dawn—there'll be a lot of that still wonder in your God; the wrath of a storm; music; the rhythm (endless, world without end) of running water; children's voices; an old man blessing a young one; a young man louting to an old one (a beautiful thing); a windless evening in autumn, when the sky is translucent violet, fainting to white, and the moon rides out, colour of an old coin; the sun on a brown hill; hares at play in young corn; a mother cat in lazy ease (all her troubles over), gravely watching her kittens, and purring entire contentment; any mother of any baby, and any father of any fine young man ready to go out into the world; any girl with her sweetheart, any boy on his first adventure; day and night; rain; spring sounds—lambs in the pasture, the cuckoo over the copse; the sea asleep and the sea in a rage—out of all these wonders, O Sanchia, you have made Him you worship, and will one day make him you are to cherish. There's no need to separate them, they are indistinguishable. And well for us that it is so. Who, what poet, do you suppose, first saw God in the Sacrament? Why, a Greek of course, who saw more in wine than a fermented liquor, and more in wheaten bread than flour and water. "The earth

and its store" went into those emblems. They received, who did receive, more than a breakfast who took that morning meal. The Greek was a metaphysician as well as a poet; but he was more poet than metaphysician. Plato used to deal with Goodness, Temperance, and Justice as if they were crystal forms, cubes, or spheres to be weighed and handled; so did the rest of his race. The Word of God incarnate, under their conduct of the notion, was to be got, whole and entire, in a flake of white bread.

And who showed us God in the Mother and Child? Why, the Romans, of course, who knew by their need what a Mother was and what a Son should be. They knew that there lay our tap-root —for we are earthy of the earth: wife and child, hearth and roof-tree, you know. You and I are neither spouses nor parents, but I suppose we learned the truth of that from our mothers' laps.

I don't think that we, as a race, have done Christianity much but harm. We might have been better left to our Wotan, Fricka, and Frey. But Christ's religion started as a pure Anarchy, and we've got it down to a rigid Oligarchy. It started as pure Emotion, and we've turned it into a code of Ethics. It was Poetry, we've made it sticky Prose. It was everything in this world and the next; it is now a negligible thing here; and as to elsewhere, we are beginning to be cautious how we believe in that. Now, the moment you turn poetry into prose you begin to tell lies. That's odd, but perfectly true.

But we live in herds in these days; we huddle in fenced cities, or round a great man's house; we build ships of war and train hosts of young men how to shoot each other in order that we may huddle the snugger, and be sure that Hans, or Alphonse, or Wilbur K. don't come and huddle here too. And so religion has got socialised and become a national affair. Hence the Trooping of Colours and many honest tears.

Men will die for that sort of religion, too, and kill their neighbours for not agreeing with them. It becomes a question of patriotism, don't you see —with this odd result, that if you want to see any religion at its best nowadays, you must go into a country where it isn't recognised. Those who have it are on their mettle there. Look at the Catholics with us in England, and try to realise what they must have been like before the Reformation. Sleek and stodgy. Look at the Protestants in Ireland. As for our blessed fellow-countrymen, if you want to see them truly religious, and meaning it from the bottom of their hearts, go and see them at church on the verandah of a Swiss hotel—in their black coats and pressed trousers—all the women in gloves; and the curate, who was in knickerbockers on Saturday and will be in them on Monday, saying, "Dearly beloved Brethren," in a throaty voice, which, thank the Lord! he will lose all the rest of the week. That's *us*, my dear, very nearly at our absurd best, and how absurd it is I despair of showing. If you want to see us at our very best, you

must go, as I tell you, to the Trooping of the Colours.

The Trooping of the Colours! And that silly ass who thought that Pan was a joke of mine! I hope I don't make such bad jokes as that.

Now, with those Colours in his mind, who dares to say that Pan and the Nymphs are not? No countryman, I'll go bail. Who said, Pan is dead? Some fawning rogue who wanted to pay a compliment. Pan dead! He is not dead, and will never die. Wherever there's a noonday hush over the Weald, wherever there's mystery in the forest, there is Pan. Every far-sighted, unblinking old shepherd up here afield with his dog knows all about him, though he'll never tell you anything of what he knows. He hasn't got his name right, very likely; but he has got *him*. Every oak tree hides a Dryad; the Oreads foot it on the heath, and the Nereids cling to the wet rocks where the green water lips their backs and surges up over their slippery shoulders. Surely, in a world of wonders, there's room and to spare for the Souls of Things, seen only by poets, but felt by all country people. And what of Artemis? Well, you know what I think about her. So long as youth is clean and quick and eager, so long will Artemis the Bright fleet along the hill-tops—and that will be for ever and ever, the Lord be praised! People with souls know these things, and people without souls don't count. They must be born again.

I sometimes think that the root of our disease lies in our bloated bodies; and then I think that

it's in our stifled minds. Really, I believe it's much of a muchness. We deceive ourselves because we want to. We prefer lies, on the whole, to truth. We like luxury so much that we are content to be bound hand and foot by it; we are such slaves to sentiment that we would go to the stake for things which are palpably false and absurd. In a sense, you can't believe too much, and can't have a too receptive mind. Who supposes that I decry belief in the supernatural? Why, I hardly believe in anything else. The supernatural only means the soul of the natural—absolutely no more than that. And who's ashamed to say that he believes in miracles? Miracles! Why, everything is a miracle. Life, Death, sunrise, the opening rose, the wind in the pines. Is Art no miracle? Poetry? Dear God! And if it be true, as your physic-monger says it is, that Art and Poetry are the result of the fermenting or not of certain alimentary juices, and that the real question is one for the liver—then the miracle is the more astounding. Pray, what does it matter to the lover whether he cries out that his heart or his liver is afire? The abiding glory, the triumph and splendour of the world is that it *is* afire. My dear, he who writes to you now knows what he is talking about. He says, Believe all you can, but tell yourself no lies. Never say that you believe what you don't believe—or you'll come to grief. But he must write no more.

Address me P.O., Petersfield. Farewell, Sanchia, as the *Anthology* says, "ten thousand times."

Is there no Religion in this? "To bristly-haired Pan and the Nymphs of the farmstead, Theodotus the shepherd lays this gift under the rock, because they stayed him when very weary under the parching summer, holding out to him honey-sweet water in their hands."

CHAPTER XI

FIRST APPEARANCE OF MR. NEVILE INGRAM

A YOUNG Mr. William Chevenix, smooth-faced, flaxen, assured, and very friendly, was a buttress of the Percival family, that is, of the younger members of it, and was of quite remarkable convenience. He could be reckoned upon, you see, to give and take confidences, never to be *impressé* unless *impressement* were required of him, to be chaperon, brother, cousin, or even uncle—whichever might be proper to the occasion. He attended Philippa Tompsett-King's drawing-room meetings, took Melusine to picture-galleries and held her parasol and catalogue for her, matched crewels for Hawise, and was always game to stand Vicky a little dinner with a music-hall afterwards. "Lectures at the Royal Institution" these were called by a pardonable euphemism. As he explained, If the Empire wasn't a royal institution, he didn't know one when he saw it. Similarly, the history of the Alhambra fully justified its inclusion. He had taught Sanchia tip-cat in his day, and met her at it with enthusiasm until by mischance he broke the *pince-nez* of Fräulein Winkiewicz when that instrument was on duty. Then tip-cat was succeeded by games of chance

with the cards. He was a very amiable, good-tempered young man, rather slangy in conversation; but Mr. Percival trusted him—which was much; and Mrs. Percival respected him—which was more. He was well-connected, and had an Aunt Maria, who was Lady Maria Wenman. He had no other occupation whatsoever.

Now, Mrs. Percival, her head (it may be) slightly turned by the Pinwell-Percival wedding, which was a great success, gave a dance in early July, and most indulgently allowed Sanchia to attend it. Sanchia, still in her twentieth year, was not yet "out," according to Mrs. Percival's decree. Next year she would be presented, all being well, and then might be allowed to coruscate; but Hawise had married brilliantly, and Sanchia's *début*, after all, had been at Gorston, and this was to be a very small dance. Mr. Percival, I regret to have to record, called it a "hop," until Vicky told him seriously that he really must—not—do it. He said meekly, "Very well, my dear; but hop it is; and hop you will until your toes come through your stockings." And then he pulled her ear, and Vicky kissed him, and all was well.

To this dance Mr. William Chevenix offered to bring a friend. Melusine and Vicky would have accepted him gladly; but he had, as he said, "to make it all right with the lady," beforehand. "Hope you won't mind, Mrs. Percival; I do hope you won't mind," he had said when he made his proposal. Mrs. Percival had replied that she had no doubt it would be delightful.

But Chevenix had pursued his thought. "You never know, you know, how a hostess will take that kind of thing. There's Mrs. John, now—my brother John's wife—look at her! Some will sweep 'em in like a dustman, and some are very sniffy. Now you're not like either of those, Mrs. Percival. That's the beauty of you. You say, Who's your friend? Very properly."

Mrs. Percival had not said so; but she was certainly pleased to be thought capable of it, and still more so to be well marked off from the dustman. She now smiled and bowed, saying, "You are most kind"; and she added, as was expected of her, "And who is your young friend?"

Chevenix at once became apologetic, extenuating. "Well, you know, I don't suppose he's much of a chap—for your set, you know. Not an intellectual johnny by any manner of means. You know what Eton and Sandhurst turn out. Turn 'em out by the round dozen, spin 'em off a lathe, you might say, all of a piece. Master Nevile was at Eton with me—didn't do much that I remember, except a *soubrette* in Molière in a Fourth of June. Then he went to Sandhurst—they got him into the Guides. Soldierin' was always his game —pugnacious old chap he used to be. Well, then, old Ingram, his governor, you know—Ingram of Wanless, awfully set up about that; Ingram of Wanless, and don't you forget it—that kind of line, they take—old Ingram dies, you see, so Master Nevile succeeds, and takes his seat, as they say—and

there you practically are. Nevile Ingram, Esquire, of Wanless Park, Felsboro'—that's the man."

He saw this sink in, then broke out querulously, as if deploring his taste in friends, "I don't say you'll like him, and I don't say you won't. No Shakespeare and musical glasses about Nevile, you know. Rich chap—well-bred and all that. Oh, they're good people, those Ingrams, you know. No connection with that lot in Duchess's Gate, mind you. Soap-boilers *they* were: I happen to know. The Wanless party's a different set altogether. And a lively customer at a dance! He can shake a leg, as they say. Ah, and you ought to see him on a horse, Mrs. Percival. That's where Nevile's at home. He's got a seat! Plays for the Go-Betweens at Hurlingham. He's at it to-day, I believe: he's mostly at it. Oh, he's not under a bushel, you know — old Nevile. No, no. He's well alight. What is it? Burning upwards to his point of bliss, eh? I forget these things so. But there he is, don't you know. And of course it's just as you feel about it—it's exactly there. I take the office, as they say, from you—bring Master Nevile—and then wash my hands. That's how I look at him, you see."

Mrs. Percival accepted Mr. Ingram on these testimonials and he came to the dance.

There were—by similar exertions on the part of similar young gentlemen—a sufficiency of dancing men, and there were some very pretty girls. But

it did so happen that the Misses Percival were the prettiest girls. They, as Mr. William Chevenix confided to his friend Nevile Ingram, were "bad to beat in that department." Melusine, glowing and graceful, in pale blue; Vicky, sparkling like a diamond, in Caroline-Testout pink; and Sanchia, slim and faintly flushed, in white chiffon—with great wide child's eyes in the face of a Goddess—were three Graces not often to be matched. Old Mr. Percival, who stood for the most part in the doorway with his friend Etherington (of Copthall Court), choked as he said more than once, "Look at my three, Bob, my boy, and show me three to match 'em—anywhere!" Mr. Etherington owned that he could not. "Tom," he said, "I congratulate you, and I envy you. Bravo, The Poultry! I only wish I had three boys to pair off with 'em." But Mr. Percival here shook his head, and was understood by Bob very well to mean that that would never have done. There had been Mrs. Percival to reckon with there. In fine, the floor was good, the music was good, the maidens were fair, the youths were toward—and once more all was well.

Mr. Nevile Ingram of Wanless, having made his bow and murmured his nothings to his hostess, entered the room, and surveyed it and its treasures. He was a wholesome-looking, confident, and clean-cut young man of five foot ten or thereabouts, with healthy, bright blue eyes and the bronzed cheeks of a soldier. His head, whose hair was inclined

to be reddish, was most smooth, and his coat gripped his neck tighter than any man's present. He was indeed faultlessly dressed, in clothes which were not new, but looked as if they were: his collar gleamed upon his tanned skin like snow in the sun. His moustaches, which were not large, had been curled with tongs, to leave his upper lip bare. That was a pity because the lip itself curled back a little, with an appearance of snarling. He looked you straight in the face when he talked to you, and seemed to take everything you said or did as a matter of course, and not to be greatly interested in it. He played the part of squire of dames languidly, as if it was an effort, but always just in time, so that you had nothing to complain of. His conversation was free and confidential; yet he spoke clearly, as if the whole world might overhear him for aught he cared. Presented to Melusine, he bowed, smiled, and said, "Greatly charmed." Then he asked, "Have you a dance?" and made a note of it upon his shirt-cuff. Melusine afterwards owned that he danced well, extremely well; but she thought that he wanted tact. She couldn't explain herself: one felt it, she said.

Vicky sized him up at a glance as "good family and vile temper," offered him a Lancers, decided that she didn't want him, was very cool to him, didn't listen to what he was saying. That he saw, and ceased to speak. Then Vicky dropped him, for Sanchia to pick up if she chose. She had no choice in the matter; but she was the only one left, and he paid her his attentions.

They danced twice, and sat out more than twice. It was on the second of these retreats that she interested him; and that led to the others. Taking him very simply, she talked about some of the thousand things that occupied her mind, as if they must needs have occupied his too. She ended by impressing him as a girl with character. When Chevenix came to look for her, the time having come for what he called "their romp round," he found her discussing education. "Education—my hat!" he exclaimed. "Sancie, you're going it!"

She had been very much in earnest, using incisive phrases, surveying life as a whole with a calmness as astonishing as it should have been pathetic. Nevile Ingram, with no eye for pathos, had been gazing at her, drinking her beauty and youth together—a heady mixture. But now she blushed and became dumb, and next she beamed and became a pretty girl, very ready for a "romp round." There is some virtue in the Chevenixes of this world, after all; it may be there's a good deal.

She had been enunciating the proposition that nobody should be taught to read until he is fourteen —"at least fourteen," had been her extreme allowance. By that time, she judged, one's power of seeing things and hearing them would be well trained; one would have become aware of the things worth knowing in the world—about plants and animals, for instance, which one simply knew nothing about as things were now. To all of

which, delivered with the clear utterance and precise conviction of a teacher, Mr. Ingram had replied very simply, "By Gad, I believe you're right." She had gone on to say that if you teach a child to read at seven, or say eight, you merely glue his eyes to a book—to book after book—for life. What he learns, therefore, is what other people know about the world; and so it goes on—hearsay upon hearsay—until, when you come to her, Sanchia's, generation, you are learning the transmitted reports of a thousand years, and are perhaps no nearer the facts than Plato was. To which Mr. Ingram, again, had replied, "All I know is, Miss Percival, that *I'm* no nearer." To himself—when Chevenix had borne off the Sibyl for her romp—he added, "Well, I'm damned." And again he said, "She's a perfect beauty." This was at the buffet below, whither he had descended, being, as he said, "off dancing after such a go as that."

He had another "go" before the evening was over, and plunged once more deeply into the mysteries of time and existence. Sanchia, having found her tongue, was quickly kindled to eloquence. It was not for Nevile Ingram to guess how this might be; but I may explain, as the fact is, that a letter from Senhouse lay in her bosom, the latest come, not yet added to a guarded packet in her writing-desk.

Mr. Ingram was not her only conquest. It was at this dance—before she was out!—that Sergius

Polschkin, the young pianist, saw her, led her to dance, and said good-night to her with tears in his eyes. "Fluffy," was Vicky's name for him; and Philippa called him the *Méringue*. We shall hear more of both these gentlemen; but not just yet. At the end of July the Percivals went out of town—to Newquay for six weeks; and then Sanchia paid a visit to her brother-in-law, Mr. Tompsett-King, and her sister Philippa. They had taken a house in North Wales, and had the Reverend Dr. Pruce staying with them, the well-known Assyriologist. I fancy that Mr. Ingram was there for a week, but am not perfectly sure. Sanchia did not mention him in her letters to Senhouse, which were regularly maintained.

CHAPTER XII

THE SECRET OUT. SENHOUSE FROM CORNWALL TO SANCHIA IN CHURCH

I NOW propose to make a jump of some months, though every time I approach the brink I hesitate. There is much in the letters from the young girl's lover, not yet so owned, which would be pleasant reading, a good deal in the several deeds of the pair which it seems injurious to Sanchia's candour to pass over. What did she do at Plâs Newydd, for instance, walking the mountain slopes with Nevile Ingram? Or may it have been with the Rev. Dr. Pruce? One doesn't know: and Senhouse didn't know either, for I find that she never named either of these gentlemen in her letters. She had plenty of other things to write about, what she and Senhouse used to call "real things" when they waxed scornful over the proneness of their kind to talk about "people" rather than "ideas." There's no doubt but that her letters were full, nor that his answers were fuller. She was deeply interested by this time in his scheme of life and conduct; and more than once we find her urging him to continue his exposition—"whatever happens." His replies laughed—she could hear him laugh

across England. "Oh, never fear me, Queen Mab! I'll preach you to death before I've done with you," he tells her.

Meantime he is fast after a score of pleasurable activities: he tells her of them. "Painting the impossible (of course), conspiring with liberty-mongers in divers tongues, writing an article on Thoreau, mending the seat of my third-best (or first-worst) pair of bags; there's for this 3rd of July." He sends her three packed sheets from the New Forest about horticulture, which he is coming to consider as, "next to music," the most sensitive of the fine arts. "Properly allied to architecture," says he, "garden-making is as near as a man may get to the divine functions. Music always excepted, mind you. That's our highest point of transcendency; and it's very odd that one has to be pretty near to what the base world calls a fool to be any good at that. There's a sidelight on the man at the street corner for you—or on the square-faced man in the market-place, rather. . . ." Reading this, she may have thought of M. Serge Polschkin, whom love ravaged so easily; but it's more likely that she pondered Man than men.

When he finds himself in Vernditch Bottom in October, Senhouse is in another vein. Sanchia is in London again—"ninety miles away, as the machinists reckon space"; but he would have her remember that space is as much of a convention as time. "So you may be as near me as you please, Queen Mab; and the nearer the better, say I."

But he contradicts himself in the next paragraph, which shows that time and space have worked their witchery upon him. He writes of "a welter across Hants and Surrey—and I see your eyes." Before his next letter, dated in November from Abbotsbury in Dorset, he has been with her in London. The odd creature comes in his tilt-cart, and picks up his "old moorings," as he calls them, in that littered triangle in Battersea which can be seen on your left hand as you go down to Brighton. It lies between York Road and Clapham Junction, if I am right. There are always caravans there, owned by friends of his, no doubt. Thence he made daily excursions into town, and saw his Muse, his divine Mistress, as best he might. He saw her at Roger Charnock's often. She dined in Grosvenor Gardens, and once slept there. On that occasion they sat up, talking and reading poetry (some of it his own), examining sketches, half the night; and he was able to tell her next day—in Kensington Gardens, in a white fog—of the magnificent walk home he had had: London empty of feet, the great blinking stars overhead, the touch of frost upon their golden eyelashes, and (at about five o'clock in the morning) "the fog-bank rolling up the river on the tide and smothering the houses in white silence. Extraordinary!" he cried, "to hear Big Ben hushed down to a child's treble! I never went to bed till seven—and had breakfast at nine." The National Gallery was another trysting-place, and the sculpture gallery of the British Museum. His

Greek lore helped her there. But mostly he chose to be with her in the open air: "I don't know you without the wind on your cheeks. Since I saw you first in Gorston Thicket, you and the West Wind seem the same person to me." She received this, as she received much of the sort, with a shy glance of happy pride. He went as far as he dared in her praise; but his reverence never let his heart out of hand. She never got any harm from him, and knew that she never could get any. Her confidence in him, indeed, was one of the sharpest trials he had to suffer. Honour to him that he came through unstained, though he would have been shocked at the proffer of it.

He saw nothing of her people, nor they of him. For him they did not exist. She was a Goddess, an incarnate Essence; she was Arcadian Artemis gracing earth once more; how should she have people? Neither for her did they exist during that week, though she came and went among them, out and in; and Vicky urged her chariot wheels over gentlemen's hearts, and Melusine inclined her head to what Mr. Gerald Scales had to say; and my Lady Pinwell was in London for the autumn session; and Mr. Nevile Ingram was expected at Brown's Hotel. These things were not for a week —a wonderful, uplifting week when the soles of her young feet seemed to touch the planets as they launched her into space. But it ended, as such weeks must end. He went his wandering ways again, and resumed his letters and reassumed his philosophy.

He now writes of "our blissful se'nnight," and then breaks off with a "No more of that! I suffer, you suffer, thought suffers, the Kingdom of God on Earth suffers. There's a conjugation of a most irregular verb, and all because the Apostle of Freedom-in-a-Ditch turns *flâneur* for the sake of a pair of deep-blue eyes. No, Queen Mab, no! I'm happy to be over the hundred miles from the centre of my System. Anything under that silly figure seems to me next door—and then of course I run in to say 'Good morning.'" "Why on earth should I want to see you?" he cries in his next. "Have I not the tongues of men and of angels, pen in hand? Who gets such piercing answers as I to my written catechisings? I scorn the man who depends upon lip-service, eye-service, or the touched hand for his soul's daily bread. At least, I hope I do."

Shortly after this I take up the tale with this, my third selection from his letters. She has invited him to be explicit, and he becomes so. The secret is out, in more senses than one.

LAND'S END, *Christmas Day.*

A touch of frost in the air, enough to make it brown at the edges; a deathly calm over the sea. The surging of the main is as faint as a sleeper's breath, just a rhythm of rise and fall. Out on the smooth water flocks of sea-birds float, their heads under their wings. Not a breath of air. I heard the church bell of Saint Ives this morning dis-

tinctly, calling the faithful to seven o'clock sacrifice. I could almost believe it was Saint Botolph's calling you. Truly, I *did* think so, and grew excited and fantastic. I bowed the knee to the great God Terminus, calculated the variation of the clock between Marylebone and Marazion, and followed your devotions faithfully from "Ye that do truly and earnestly" to "The peace of God." I'm a fool, you know, exulting in his foolishness.

And then I re-read your Christmas letter, which I got yesterday. and perpended your questions—such a string of them! What's my secret? Can no one learn it? Am I to be the Second Wisest Man on Earth, and is nobody to be the Wisest Woman? Won't I tell you how I manage to be happy? What's my way of salvation? *Et cetera. Et cetera. Et cetera.*

Oh, it's ridiculous that it should be a secret at all; it's humiliating that it should be hard to learn. I'm ashamed of myself sometimes (when the old time-serving Adam lifts up his bruised head and gibbers at me) that I should be so happy and the rest of the world so miserable; but then I sit up and shake my fist at my countrymen, and rail at them. "Blind, deaf, dumb brutes that ye are! (Hear me reprove this generation.) All my shame is for you. Clogged by filthy things about the feet—your money, sham honour, sloth, vanity, gluttony; clogged by sticky things about the heart, and stodgy things about the head—your respect for what is unvenerable in age, your fear of im-

mortal youth, your misdoubt of your neighbour's worthless judgment—how can I be other than ashamed of you, who have but to straighten your backs and lift your hands, and say, We are men, to find out that you are so?" And reflecting that that, simply, is the conclusion of the whole matter, such heat becomes absurd. The thing has but to be stated, you would say. No, no. They don't know it, because they won't. They have lived so long on lies that they'd starve on truth. Well, well, let 'em wallow, tied by the leg in their styes. But if I were autocrat I'd make it penal for any one to have more than a hundred and fifty a year; and to him who could do on a hundred I'd resign the throne as to the wisest of us.

The Many must change and pass as best they can; but to you, who are of the Elect, asking me how one is to be free, I'll tell you—there's only one way. Whether you desire to be free to live at large on this jolly green earth, or free to have your conversation in heaven, there's only one way. You *are* free, really. All right then: act as if you were. Drop all the rest; walk away from it into the Open Country. Fields of England, Elysian fields—there are no hedges. Forsake all and go there. Take nothing with you—nothing, nothing. Upon my solemn word of honour, *that's all.*

Why, take my own case. Here am I, ordinary third son of ordinary English parents: father an alderman, mother a clergyman's daughter, brothers at the bar or the Stock Exchange (one at Lloyd's),

sisters flirting with curates or going to mothers' meetings; nothing more entirely of the staple to be conceived; different, in fact, from my kindred only in this, that I lead a free life while they are fast bound in misery and iron. And I'll tell you the ins and outs of it now—on this quiet morning, on this quiet cliff, looking over that sleeping sea. You are entitled to them, since you are become part of them; you, Sanchia, with your quiet ways and wondering, wonderful eyes. . . .

It was at Cambridge that I found out what a fool I was teaching myself to be. From 1881 to 1884 (which was my third year) it had been gradually dawning upon me, I suppose, though it came with a rush at the end. Before that I had been the bird's-nesting schoolboy of common acquaintance. True, I had always been fond of Greek and couldn't help drawing—but that was literally all I was to the good.

I don't know just how or why I found out what I had to do, if I was to justify myself to myself. In spite of myself I suppose that I was discovering that everything you bought with money tied you up, more or less, to that thing; and that the fun you got out of the thing that you bought was as nothing compared to the freedom you lost by getting it. That must have been a cerebral process unawares; but one morning, anyhow, I woke up outraged by the ceiling of my room, shocked at the four walls of it. I seemed to be strangling; I thought that they were closing in upon me. Shades of the prison-house,

saith he! Yes, old Wordsworth, but the growing boy don't know that they are there, and so they ain't; but the growing man does. From that hour I panted for breathing-room, and found that every blessed thing I touched, and called mine, was so much clog-and-hamper. The four walls of the Nine-and-Thirty Articles seemed more deadly than brick and mortar; and ahead of me I could see, yawning like a grave, the black hull of Dingeley Main Colliery, where I was to toil in order to imprison myself yet more tightly; whither I was surely bound, one of a manacled file of convicts, hounded on by the shocking necessity of being "settled down." Settled down! Devilish formula, which condemns us, generation after generation, to vegetate—and rot—and rot!

I chucked everything, as you know. I walked out, I disappeared. I walked, as a matter of fact, to King's Lynn, and got there lateish. I found a solemn-looking buster in an inn-yard ruminating over an ostler at his horse, and jingling half-crowns in his breeches pockets. That was the rhythm of his life—"Property, property, property"; but he was better than he seemed—had a kink in him somewhere which saved him. We got talking. He was a good sort, with a humorous twist on his long face, and a good twinkle in his heavy eye. Presently I said, "I'll tell you what. It's time for dinner. I'll toss you who dines the other." He looked at the ground, then at me—heavily. Then he said with tremendous solemnity, "Done with

you, codger." We tossed with one of his half-crowns, three times, and I won. That was a friendly turn (one of many) done me by Pan and the Nymphs, or by Artemis Einodiē, *Our Lady of the Ways*; for I give you my word I hadn't a stiver nearer than Cambridge. "I've lost, it appears," says the chap. I said, "You've lost more than it appears, for I lunched off a turnip." He was a sportsman, though, and did the thing as well as could be. We sat talking till long past midnight; and I was his guest for bed and breakfast.

Next day I was on the North Sea in a trawler, working my way out—and infernally ill, by the way. We were four days going over; but they put me ashore in North Holland, and I tramped to Alkmaar.

I nearly starved in that country—you see, I didn't know the language; but the weather was superb, and I got through all right into Germany. There I knew I could get on, because I had things to give them which they wanted. Germany is the best country in Europe in which to go to market with your knowledge. They really want it off you, you see. I stayed in a little town called Wissening for three months or so, at pedagogy. I gave lessons in English and Greek, and earned nearly five pounds one way and another. That gave me what I was bound to have (and what I had at Cambridge too; only I was on my mettle, don't you see, and wouldn't send for anything. I wasn't going to communicate with England until I could report that I was

keeping myself)—I mean colours, and boards, and some brushes, and all that. I got these in Berlin, and pen and ink too; and then I set to work, and have never had to look back. I've kept myself ever since, and will take credit for this, moreover, that I've been wise enough never to earn more than I want, or to save anything. Directly you do either of those things, say I, you drive a peg through your foot into the ground, and you root. Sick? Of course I've been sick, and mighty sorry for myself. But I've skirmished through somehow; and people have been very good. They are, you know; nearly everybody is very good. One of my maxims is that there are no such things as nations; and another that every man is worth shaking hands with for something or other. (I've proved 'em both.) My worst time was in Siberia, where a woman of no character whatever, according to the wiseacres of this world, proved to me that she had a great deal. Anna was her name—Anna Marievna. She would have nourished me with her blood, good soul, if she'd had any. But blood was at famine prices: the Russians took care of that.

All that was in '84–5; and here we are ten years on, and I've been as happy as the days are long ever since, and as free as a bird of the air. Looking back on it, I'm surprised at two things only—the deadliness of the disease and the simplicity of the remedy. Why every mother's son of us don't do it beats me altogether. Poverty, Temperance,

and Simplicity—these three. But the greatest of these is Poverty. That's what I and the Socialists will have to fight about. They want everybody to be rich, and I say they are aiming then at Murder and Suicide.

If you come to think out, really, how you grow, mentally, morally, and physically, you'll find that you do it by wanting things. They are above you, out of reach; you want them very badly; they won't come to you; so you grow until you can reach them. Then—strange thing!—when you have them, when they are under your hand, you learn that (without knowing it) you have been enjoying them all the time you were growing after them—your growth, in fact, consisting in that—and that consequently you don't want them at all, but rather desire, and must by all means have, those other things up there, still higher and just out of reach. So you go on craving, and go on growing and reaching up; and up and up you grow until presently you find yourself at the top of all your desires except one. By that time you are too old to grow any more, and only want to go to sleep. And behold! there at the top sits friendly Death, with a warming-pan.

Broadly speaking, that's the process. And take notice that there's no healthy condition, and no happiness whatsoever, unless we do grow. No happiness whatsoever, O Sanchia, unless we grow every hour of our lives. That's as sure as Fate. Think it out; knit your brows over it, and you'll see.

That's the first thing to keep in your mind, my dear, when you're about considering what you want and how you're to get it. What you really want out of life is ability to develop—to grow. Now, it's plain enough, I hope, that you can't want things which you've got already, or can get in exchange for money or privilege; and that you can't reach after things if some hireling is for ever ready to put them in your lap. Consequently, if you have money, or the privilege of class, being born, as they profanely say, with a gold spoon in your mouth, you can't be healthy, because you can't grow. I hope that's a point in favour of Destitution. It ought to be, to the candid mind.

I don't want to write a treatise; but I'm very keen on all this—and anyhow it's your fault. The next thing you want—and it's the same thing—is to be happy. I should like to know who doesn't want to be happy? Now that, they say, is a relative state. And yet it's not, you know. There's really only one state of happiness, since Process and not Rest is the law of this world, and that's Acquisition. Possession isn't happiness at all. Possession is static, Acquisition ecstatic. So long as this world spins and wheels round the sun, so long shall we be at our best when we conform, and spin on our own, and wheel round the Sun of our Desire. To have a thing cannot be blissful, but to have had it may be, and to be about to have it exquisite joy. The past should be lovely, and the future must be so. The present (and there's no such thing really.

Everything flows, said the Sage, and even as he said it the moment had gone)—the present is merely a breath: time for a flash of reminiscence or preparation, and then on you go. Present possession, therefore, is a delusion; and if it were a real thing, as some fools try so hard to make it, consciousness of it would only be contentment—not happiness. Contentment is a swinish thing. The man who is content has done growing, and will immediately begin to rot—like a bulb, unless you start him growing afresh.

Oh, take an illustration which comes pat just now, while K—— and Co. are bellowing about our greatness, and all-red maps of Europe. Heaven about us, here's a confusion of thought—muddy brainwork! Hear them befoul the "Little Englanders," my dear soul; by which term they are pleased to refer to the Englander before the Empire—the men, I'll trouble you, of the Armada and the days before Waterloo. Drake a Little Englander, Cromwell, Wolfe and Moore and Wellington, Little Englanders all. The heroes, according to these fellows, are the men who *have* an Empire, not the men who made it. It's heroic to possess a thing, eh? Who will teach 'em to think straight?

To have an Empire is not heroic at all. To have had one may be, to be getting one may be. We were a race of heroes from Crécy to Waterloo, but since then have been merely swine, grunting our contentment and repletion. We may be heroes again some day when we've done wallowing; but

meantime persons who believe themselves patriots are doing all they know to stave off that day by heaping armaments and bluffing Europe. Heroes, we! Why, we've got degeneration of the heart. We're like Fat Women at a fair—at the best, curious, and rather disgusting. But all this is neither here nor there.

And now, if you'll tell me how we are to grow, or be happy, or get our faculties free unless we are poor, I shall be very much obliged to you, and will go back to the Dingeley Main Colliery to-morrow, and wear a black coat, and pay taxes. But you can't—and nobody can.

Mind, Body, and Estate, Poverty is the only hope. Have nothing.

Have nothing—and you're thrown back on what is inside you. That's your own, and all that's worth having.

Have nothing—and the broad world is your fee.

Have nothing—and you're neither clogged about the brain nor the feet.

Have nothing, and you have no looking-glass. Without a looking-glass you don't know what you look like; and if you don't know that, you cease to wonder whether your neighbour sees you as fine a fellow as you see yourself. Almost all our troubles in England come from that: we are awfully set up by the appearance we make to ourselves, and miserably apprehensive of the conclusions the rest are drawing of us. We daren't be

ourselves, lest we be taken unawares, and Jones, or Jones' man, see us with our armour off. Did I ever tell you that I saw a Colonel of Light Horse walk down the Tornabuoni in Florence carrying a fish in newspaper under his arm? I did it though. Any country in Europe has more freedom than ours. Why? Because it has fewer looking-glasses.

"As having nothing, yet possessing all things." I'm not very fond of the Levantine, but by George he was right there. And of course he was a magnificent sophist.

So now abide for you, Queen Mab, Poverty, Temperance, Simplicity—these three. But the greatest of these is Poverty. For if you are poor you will find Temperance repay you; and since you can't afford a looking-glass, you will remain as simple as you are sweet.

By the bye, you mustn't take my short cut to happiness, you know. Don't go off to King's Lynn, there's a dear. It led me near to knavery, I believe, when I tossed for a dinner. Keep you to the high-road, dear one, and shed your baggage by degrees. Ah, that broad high-road! If we two could share poverty, and hear the stars bid us good-night! If the great Open Country could be seen for a goodly heritage by two pair of eyes, and if two tongues could voice *Nunc Dimittis* at the last milestone! We live by growing, say I? And we are happy in aspiring? Yes, but to have had is good too; and I, *poverello*, have had something,

Sanchia. Nay, nay, I have had good measure. And so farewell.

Here's a text for you, not from the *Anthology*, but from the learned Epictetus, an antick sage. "Think you," says he, "you can be a wise man, and continue to eat and drink and be wrathful, and take offences as you have been used? Nay, but you must watch and labour, my man, and withdraw yourself from your household, and be despised by any serving-boy, and be quizzed by your neighbours, and take the last place all the world over. . . . Consider these things," he saith, "whether you are willing at such a price to get Peace, Freedom, and an Untroubled Spirit. And if you are not, then attempt it not, nor, like a child, play now the philosopher, then the tax-collector, then the orator, then the Procurator of Caesar. For these things agree not among themselves, and, good or bad, it behoves you to be One Man. You should be perfecting your power over yourself, or over your outward snugness; spending yourself on the life within you, or on the life without. That is to say, you must take your place either among Men or Swine."

A wise man that.

CHAPTER XIII

MR. N. INGRAM ON THE POETS AND PHILOSOPHERS

BEFORE that letter was written—a month before—Mr. Nevile Ingram, that blue-eyed confident young man, came to London from Wanless, and installed himself at Brown's Hotel. His friend Chevenix dined with him at the Coffee-Tree Club and they went on afterwards to the Alhambra, and elsewhere. I don't propose to trace the impress of their neat pumps, but it's my duty to record a snatch of their conversation at the Coffee-Tree.

Ingram, when the walnuts and port had been reached, asked, "By the way, are your friends the Percivals got back yet?" and Chevenix stared at him.

"Bless you, yes. Lord bless you, yes. Course they are. Why, old Tom Percival's a city magnate. How about the Mansion House?" And he reflected. "Why, I don't suppose old Tom's missed a Lord Mayor's Show for thirty years. I don't suppose he's ever had more than a month's leave since he got any leave at all. Bank Holidays and Saturdays to Mondays are *his* game. And the Lady's a better housekeeper than you'd take her for. She'll not trust old Tom alone for more than

six weeks—not she. Two months at the outside. No, no. Mamma's a downy bird, a very downy bird—and"—he spoke with sudden energy—"and don't you forget it, Nevile."

Ingram flattened a walnut. "Why should I remember it?" he asked calmly, and Chevenix stared anew and snorted.

"You're a cool fish, you know," he said. "I'll do you that credit. You don't sing to one clear piano in divers tones. Not you. You take a line, I'm dashed."

Then Ingram drained his glass, and poured another. "I met one of 'em—no, two of 'em, in Wales in September. At the married sister's—a Mrs. Something-King — sharp-tongued woman with an owl of a husband." Chevenix was looking at him narrowly, disregarding all this surplussage.

"Then you met Sancie?"

"That," said Ingram, "was exactly who I did meet."

"Then," said Chevenix with conviction, "you met the very pick of the basket."

Ingram nosed his port, then sipped it; then said, "So I think."

It was now to be seen that Chevenix was agitated. He crossed and re-crossed his leg, used his finger-bowl, tied his napkin into a knot, said, "Damn this pub. Why can't a man smoke when he's done eating?" frowned, grew red in the face.

"Look here, Nevile," he said finally, "are you going to call there?"

Ingram said, "I think so. Why?"

Chevenix threw himself back, and said it was infernally hot. The place, he said, was a ghastly bakehouse. "Have some more port," Ingram proposed; but he replied, "Damn port," and called for coffee and old brandy.

With these refections at hand he was revived, and grew more deliberate in speech.

"Now, look here, Nevile, my boy," he began; and Ingram did look there. "We must have no hole-and-corner business over this. I like those people. I've known 'em all my life. I like 'em all, except the Lady and Philippa—and no one in his senses could like them. But they're not your sort, you know, not one bit they're not. They're simple, jolly, plain people—who love their fun, and are keen on all sorts of things that you've never heard of. Poetry, good Lord! Shakespeare—and Byron—and John Keats. Bless you, they're gone on Keats. They think he was ripping. And I daresay he was. But that's not your line of country at all—no! nor Thoreau either, and Plato and those kind of philosophical johnnies. What's all that to you? *You* want Ruff's Guide, you know—and Soapy Sponge; good old Facey Rumford!" He stopped, flushed and inspired. Ingram, staring, sipped his port.

"Now take Sancie Percival," Chevenix went on. "She's a baby, you know—in a way; and yet she's got a head on her which—well, a head which—beats a cock-fight, by George! There's a lot in

front of that girl—I know there is. I can see it all coming as plain as I can see you're taking too much port. You always do, you silly old ass. You always did." He shook his head. "I'm awfully fond of Sancie. She's a queer young customer—and as pretty as they can be made on this planet, so far as *my* experience goes. Now look here, Nevile"—and with his elbows on the table he looked closely at his friend—"what are you up to?"

"Up to?" said Ingram. "Nothing."

"I hope not," said Chevenix, "with all my soul. Because I don't forget—if you do—that it was I who took you there—and made it all right with the Lady—and"—he lowered his voice, but hissed the words in his energy—"and never said a syllable about your private affairs either. Now what do you make of that?"

Ingram looked bored. "I make nothing of it," he said. "What can be made of it?"

"I'll tell you," said Chevenix, and struck the table. "A clean breast can be made of it."

Ingram gloomed at the littered table. "Damn her," he said. "God damn her."

Chevenix said, "Exactly." Then they went to the Alhambra, and elsewhere.

I think that perhaps Mr. Chevenix did his friend some injustice—I mean did some injustice to his standing towards the poets and philosophers. I am not prepared to admit that Ingram knew as little about them, or cared as little, as did Mr. Chevenix himself. I know that for the best part

of a month—before he went to Cairo for Christmas—he spent a great deal of his time poring over the *Prometheus Unbound* of Shelley, and that Vicky Percival, home from a party in the quarter just before midnight, raised her eyebrows more than once.

"What! Still at it?" she used to say. "You two will make yourselves ill. It will all come out in spots on your foreheads, and then Mr. Ingram will dab on black plaster, and Sancie will powder herself. It can't be worth it; no poetry could be. Sancie, my dear, go to bed. Am I very late? Did mamma say anything? I did try to go, lots of times; but they said it would spoil everything."

Ingram used to say, "It's all right, Miss Vicky. I made it all square for you. You can always leave that to me."

Vicky would look at him with bright eyes, full, however, of thought. "I should very much like to know what can be left to you," she would say, "and what can't." Then she would ask, "When *are* you going to Cairo, by the way?" and his answer would be, "Any moment." As she said, as Chevenix had said, he was a very cool hand.

I don't know how far they got in the *Prometheus* during those autumn nights; but Ingram was certainly faithful to it—and of course the reading of poetry does permit of excursions into fact, by way of comment. He was very much interested in Panthea's famous line—

> Their shadows make
> The space within my plumes more black than night,

directly he had had explained to him the extraordinary imaginative force in them—the visualisation, we may call it. "That's clever of you," he said, "to see all that in it. I should never have thought of that. It's awfully clever."

She explained honestly. "A friend of mine pointed it out. Of course I should never have seen it for myself. In fact, I had read *Prometheus* before, lots of times, and thought nothing of Panthea's wings."

Ingram, at his favourite trick of looking at her as if he was drinking her, here twisted his mouth. "You've got lots of clever chaps about you, I expect," he said ruefully. "That's the worst of me. I'm such a dunce. Now all these friends of yours will be swells—poets and all that?"

"There's only one of them, you know," she said, smiling. "I only know one poet."

"Oh, come," he said, "that's better than I thought." She made no answer. His next speech was undoubtedly sincere.

"I'm very much in earnest, you know, about this kind of thing. A man can be keen on poetry without being a poet. I know I am. It does me a power of good. It makes a better chap of me all round. Thanks to you."

She corrected him. "Thanks to Shelley."

"No, to you," he insisted. "Where on earth should I have been without you? Some filthy hole! Killing tigers—or peacocks!"

"Mr. Senhouse," she said, "the Poet, thinks it

rather horrible to kill animals. He thinks it quite horrible. He says we can't make them to save our lives; we can only blow them to bits. That's what he says."

"He would, you know," Ingram said, and added after a moment, "By George, and he's perfectly right. A man's a butcher. It's sickening. But you'll pull me through, Miss Sancie. I never knew what life was until I——"

Sanchia said, "Let's go on—shall we?" She covered her cheeks with her hands.

"We will," he agreed. "We'll stick to Shelley. Now for the Furies. You be First Fury, I'll be Second—and so on." And at it they went—to "The struggling world, which slaves and tyrants win." Then came some commentary upon slavery and tyranny in general, some Anarchism out of Senhouse's wallet, and the assurance from Ingram that some forms of slavery suited him excellently, and that some forms of tyrants could do as they chose with him. "They have only to lift a little finger—a *very* little finger indeed—to have me at their feet." And then, opportunely, Mrs. Percival came into the schoolroom and showed an interest in the students.

Sanchia's own interest in Ingram, I am certain, so far, was purely didactic. I am speaking of the month before Christmas. He was most receptive; she could practise on him what had been preached to her, hand on her stores from Senhouse. In

order to teach any one you must be able to formulate your own knowledge; there must be no haziness. She was a conduit, a most enthusiastic conduit: it was exquisite to her to feel the thrill of the steady stream coursing through her mind. Having an exact memory, she forgot nothing of what she had been told, rehearsed it all copiously, and was grateful to her pupil when he asked for more. He had, of course, the wit to see that this was so, and to make the most of his chances. Moreover, he was honestly and explicitly in love with her. He didn't conceal it for a moment—any more than did Senhouse. She saw it, knew it without seeing—and waived it. It was interesting, even flattering; but she still had other things, more important things, to think about and to do. If it is sweet to learn of a friend, it is sweeter to teach a friend; and she had persuaded herself that Ingram was a friend.

Gallant, noble, inspired young creature—the risks she ran! Her confidence! Her intrepidity! But one must face them in her honour and praise: they are essential to the understanding of her martyrdom. Her passion, if it was to come, was late in coming: at this hour of hers Senhouse was exactly right in defining her as he did. The Virgin unconscious of virginity, the Chaste by preoccupation. She was that. There are, of course, two kinds of virgin. There's the deliberate Virgin, to whom the state is in itself holy, for whom Athena stands; and there is the Virgin in fact, who has no thought of being otherwise, who is concerned with one thing at a time,

who cannot pause in her wild quest to think, am I holy, am I spotless? On her brow Artemis of Arcady lays a cooling hand, and teaches her the grace of guarded lips. Senhouse knew this, and thanked God to know it: but what of Mr. Ingram? What of Mr. Chevenix's friend of the Alhambra, and elsewhere?

I shall do him justice. He knew nothing of all this, but he felt it—at present. He loved; was in that early stage of the passion when the beloved is a Revelation from Heaven, "half angel and half bird." Something held him back—him, too, who was not accustomed to refuse what came his way. All time was before him, the time for wanting, the time for fearing loss, and the time to claim and grasp. Just now he basked—as a young man full of his new virility will be contented in the sunshine, presently to be stirred by the glory and tingle of it to scale mountains, hunt swiftly, to seize and kill, then to eat and drink with healthy appetite.

But Ingram, withal a young man, had a good deal of experience behind him. He had been his own master through a long minority, and had been of age eight years at least. With a fine income, large estate, hearty appetite, and few scruples, Wanless had bowed down to him, London had been very kind. That which he needed seemed so obviously his due that he had been forced more than once by an overpopulated world to look alive for his chances. He had always had what he seriously wanted, but had sometimes had to exert himself to get it. This

made him wary. On the occasion of that Shelley discussion to which I have just referred—or immediately after it—he had advised with himself about Sanchia's friend. Who was this? Was he possibly—could he possibly—? Difficult questions: he turned the possibilities about. A close commentator, this fellow: keen on poetry—which was first-rate stuff, mind you, if you had the right sort of girl to read with—a queer fish, too, with his notions about shooting; a sort of anarchical fellow, what? Senhouse by name. Who was this Senhouse? He might have to be reckoned with at a pinch. But on the whole—no! Ingram classified him loosely, for convenience, as a "philosophical johnny," probably rather old. Eye-glasses and a bald head, he thought, would meet the case. Put at that, he was not dangerous.

And so much for John Maxwell Senhouse.

CHAPTER XIV

SENHOUSE ON CIVILISATION

SENHOUSE stayed out the winter at Land's End, engaged in the absorbing pursuit of naturalising Alpine plants upon the faces of rock there. Twice a week, sometimes oftener, he wrote to Great Cumberland Place; once a week, sometimes less often, he heard from it. He knows nothing, and would care less than nothing, of Mr. Ingram's introduction to Poetry, but has much to tell Sanchia of this work of his—of his failure in past years and hopes for future. We read of *Androsace lanuguinosa*, *Draba aizoïdes*, of *Lithospermum prostratum* (there's to be a blue sheet of that), and of *Ramondia pyrenaica*, "that exquisite rosette of dark green and mauve, of which I shall never have enough. Rejoice with me, Queen of Flowers and Faery. I have three—three!—self-sown plants of it, which will flower in April. I must be here to see; and it would be well that you were here also." His enthusiasm over this growing passion for transforming England by means of flowers goes well in hand with his social schemes. He had, in fact, discovered his life-work. "England a garden!" he cried out in a letter to Sanchia, "and Englishmen the gardeners! I'll die for that war-shout. Isn't it finer than your All-red

map, Kipling, Henley, and Co.? Oh, men, throw down your big drums and concertinas; forsake your beanfeasts and city dinners; take up your spades and follow me! What is your bombast about, if not to make this panting country more fat and less able to move; its workmen richer and so more idle? Pah, you dullards, what's worth having beside work?" He turns to rend the opposite camp. "And you, trades-unionists, with your eight hours' day—do you know what you are about? You are slaying manhood, that's what you're doing. Every hour you get docked off your work-time will be spent gaping at a football match, or goading whippets to kill wired-in rabbits. And what's the worth of a man glutted with dead rabbits, or hoarse with ravings at the Oval? If he played his football I might have less to say. But he don't. He pays hirelings to do it for him, and eggs them on by bawling and cursing. Agitate for the right to work longer hours, you blind bats, you; agitate for leave to work the flesh off your fingers if you choose. Then at least you'll have got freedom, though you die for it. Better die free, and leave free men to follow you, than watch slaves play your games for you—hey?"

He gets very wild over all this, and leads his young Sanchia across a difficult country—with frequent apologies, however. "Queen Mab, forgive me, do. I take you trapesing through the market-place and soil your white robe in public mire. Shame upon me! I might as well draw you into a gin-palace and make you sit scared among the sodden men and blue-

nosed, trembling women there as lead you to ponder these awful things. But you have a great soul, Sanchia, and can go where Beatrice went, I hope."

The letter which I print now is the outcome of his social considerations. She must have asked him to account for mankind at large. How, for instance, did he square up his individualist convictions with the needs of a complicated society? If his was the only sane life, how was a populace to lead it? He must have given some time to the answer, which breaks a spell of silence. It is more carefully written, less incoherent, less rhapsodical than usual.

LAND'S END, *Early March.*

That was a wholesome inquiry of yours, O Artemis of the Haven (λιμενῖτι Ἄρτεμι, says the *Anthology*, and "to whom, O blessed one, all meshes have been given"). To thee, my Blessed One, I give now the rudderings of my thought, put through as fine a mesh as I could compass.

It's vastly well, upon my word, that I should live at my ease, and sleep under the stars, and go my ways, owing no man anything. But I have asked myself pretty often, as you ask me now, What of the other thirty million poor devils who moil in cities for their wives and offspring? What is to be done with them? Can they not be helped to my tub and crust and cup of cold water? Pertinent questions of yours, most wise and holy lady—to which here's a sketchy kind of an answer. They demand a pamphlet, you know; but I spare you that.

When you come to talk about people instead of persons you are brought up against Society, and are reminded of the fact, so conveniently forgotten, that men have got now to be gregarious. I'm afraid that condition is of too long standing to be quarrelled with, even by me; but I don't doubt that the unit was originally the family, and not the tribe. I suppose we first began to herd and huddle to protect our naked bodies against furry beasts, like wolves, and that we then found out (having scored off the wolves) that a state of defence was a pretty jumping-off ground for being offensive. I should like to know in whose bodies reside the souls of the first palisadoed lot who raided a neighbour's stake-fence. In this our rascally island, I misdoubt. However, here we are, a society, and a nation: a Great Power, Queen, Lords and Commons, and all the rest of it—a vast and piebald congregation, every member of which, they assure me, has a soul to be saved and a body to be washed.

I accept that, and go on to observe that these things being so—*rebus se habentibus ut nunc*, as the Schoolman puts it—we must now talk, in the current slang, about Civilisation. Civilisation is the hope of the hour, so fixed a quantity that a chap wrote of it the other day as if it was a disease. *Civilisation, its Cause and Cure*, was the name of his treatise; and I believe he was perfectly serious. It used to mean, in Bentham's day, "the greatest happiness of the greatest number," which was modest of Bentham. I think we have now screwed it up

to "greatest happiness of everybody," which is pleonastic, because happiness is good enough for anybody. You might as well talk of the "greatest whiteness" as of the "greatest happiness." But sloppy phrases are characteristic of an age of newspapers. Anyhow, what the newspapers call civilisation, you and I call salvation.

Are we civilised, by the way? Are we getting civilised? Are we more civilised than the Greeks were in Socrates' time? Or the Romans in Cicero's? Or the Italians in Leonardo's? Or the English in Sir T. More's? Are we more humane, you might say? We are told so, I know; but between you and me and the Atlantic, I doubt it profoundly. Individually, we certainly are not; collectively, not one atom. If we act individually like maniacs, as I've been telling you we do, we act in the mass like the hosts of Midian. Until war—to name but one public vice—is spoken of in the terms we now use to reprobate drunkenness, or gluttony, or the drug-habit, I decline to recognise that we are civilised at all. But, so far from that, we devastate the heathen; we exhaust ourselves in armaments; we cause the flower of our youth to perish for all-red maps; we still teach diplomats to lie and politicians to cadge for votes like the street-boys for coppers; we thieve at large, brag the great year through, bluster, howl at other people playing games for us; lift pious hands (to a heaven we don't believe in) at our rival's enormities; we cant and vapour—out upon us! and what for? For two things only, Sanchia; for two

things which are fatal to real civilisation—that money may be easy and that labour may be saved. If you will mention to me one public act of the last fifty years which has not been directed to the acquisition of money, or one mechanical invention which has not aimed at the saving of labour, I'll throw up the sponge and commence stockbroker.

Now, money, I say, is the one cause of slavery, and work the one hope of salvation. Therefore our civilisation, as they disastrously term it, is a condition of acquiring slavery easily, and of obliterating the hope of salvation. Pretty, isn't it, when you take the clothes off? Happy state of things! Noble ideals, shared by the Great Unionist Party and the Great Liberal Party, turn and turn about. There'll be a Great Labour Party one of these days, bickering with the others for a share in these splendid endeavours. It really might seem to you as if I was joking; but I write with tears in my eyes—that these things should be!

I don't want to labour my argument, but I must repeat myself. Civilisation is a condition of freedom to use your faculties to their fullest extent; and your faculties are every power of mind and heart and muscle and sense. Very well. Now I say that every sovereign you put into a man's pocket seduces him away from the use of his faculties, and every machine you devise directly deprives him of one of them—and then where are we? Why, here; that what is true of a man is true of a million of men, and that, so far from being more civilised than the Peri-

clean Athenians, we are actually less so than the neolithic dweller on the South Downs, who hacked up the earth with a red deer's horn, and drove his cattle to the dew-pond at sundown, and back again into an enclosure banked against the wolves. And that's very odd, because with art and poetry behind us and before, we might by this time be like the Sons of God.

I won't say any more about money, lest I be a bore. I'll take Poverty for granted, as the only hope of freedom and dignity, and have a shy at machinery, which I am telling you decimates our faculties. First we'll have a simple case. Suppose that I, in the pursuit of my art, have learned how exquisitely to point a lead-pencil; and next conceive of some ingenious rascal who invents a machine, and sells it for a penny, which sharpens them as well as I can. What happens? I am tempted immediately to say, "Prodigal that I am! What hours of a short lifetime have I not wasted over pencils! What grime have I not collected in my finger-nails! What soap not consumed!" Thus I fall into the pit digged for me by that ungodly one, and then and there lose the mystery, art, and craft of pointing pencils. Thereby, and to that extent, I have crippled my faculties of eye and hand and judgment; thereby, and to that extent, those faculties atrophy. Do you follow me? Am I not right? Oh! of course I am. Now let's take a high flight: *paulò majora canamus.*

Let's aim a shaft at the printing-press—that semi-

divine institution. Before the devil inspired Gutenberg to scheme for a statue in Maintz, Literature was a sacred mystery, a kind of priesthood to which a man came as through the fire, by the clean grace of God. The poet or historian was a hierophant. If poet, he sang his own song; if historian, spoke his own tale. Literature, then, was twin-sister of Music, addressed the soul through the ear. Words were phrases, letters were notes. And more than that, oh, much more than that! The hearers of such literature, who were a thousandfold more than the readers of it, had to get it by rote. "By heart" is a finer phrase; ah, they got it by heart, Sanchia, as I have got you. That's to say, they were filled with it, as the Apostles with the Holy Ghost; they lived on it; it was permanent possession, not *of* a great thing (oh, no, no!), but *by* a great thing. The fellows went their ways carrying a divine tenant, inspired by him, driven by him to a flight. Imagine the man who absorbed the *Odyssey* by these means! Or the *Purgatorio*! Or got "by heart" the great choruses from the *Agamemnon* or the *Œdipus*! I can picture him following the rhapsodist from deme to deme, or working it afoot from Athens to Corinth to get more of Æschylus into his head. Is there no use of faculty in all that? Isn't that the only way of enlarging faculty, to sharpen every sense, exercise every fibre? It's so obvious that it's barely worth while to ask the question.

Now, what has the printing-press done to advance the use of faculty? To begin with, it has

destroyed memory: a very useful performance! Next, it has cheapened poetry. It is now within a man's power to buy Wordsworth for twopence—and to value him accordingly. For when money is your standard of value, a colourless diamond is worth more than a sea-blue sapphire, and a ten-guinea Encyclopædia than Poesy out of a two-penny box. That also is doing Literature a friendly turn, I suppose. Next, it has destroyed the charming art of caligraphy—very kindly. It has given us rotten paper instead of fine parchment, so that the things which we read and don't remember may reasonably perish. It has turned Literature into a kind of pictorial art instead of a musical; for to one man whose poetry is addressed to the ear there are now a thousand (from Keats to Browning, and on and on) who endeavour to hit you with it in the eye. That's how we get "scarlet pains" and "purple noons" into poetry; and

> Perturb
> With drip acerb,

and other flowers of speech. You don't get such freaks in Homer or Dante; and Shakespeare, thank God, lived too near the great free days to consider readers before hearers. Besides, the playhouse can never be infected with Gutenberg's poison. Well, then, lastly, the printing-press has made the newspaper possible; and if it had never done anything else it should have earned everlasting infamy for Gutenberg. These things that shameless ma-

chine of his has done, and not left a number of things undone, which it would be tedious to mention. Enough of it, and its brothers in iniquity, the railway and the steam-plough and the automaton chess-player.

Now let us get on a bit. Imagine England as a nation solving its problems as I solved my own, dropping everything, walking to freedom *viâ* King's Lynn. How is that to be?

Well, you know, I feel pretty hopeful that something of the kind will come to pass. It won't be in your time or mine. You will be a saint and I a comic reminiscence long, long before. But it's amusing to work it out; and there's this about it—that within quite a short space, at any moment, a handful of the Elect may—walk to King's Lynn. The rest will wait—and they must. There's Socialism in their way: a powerful enemy to civilisation, because it accepts the money standard and is sworn ally of machinery.

We are in for a spell of Socialism. I see that clearly. It is coming quite fast. Two more general elections and the Socialists will be a great party.

It's so confoundedly plausible, you see. It accepts such a lot of scurvy institutions as fixtures—which really aren't fixtures at all. It's like a new tenant coming into a house, saying to the old one, "Oh, don't trouble to move that gas-stove, pray. I can use it as a dressing-table." It has collared the trades unions at the start by the prospects of easy money and light work (why not say at once,

Easy drugs and cheap death-beds?). It will come on by way of corporations, which will absorb private enterprise; and the State, which will absorb the corporations. Water, gas, old Charnock's beer, my father's colliery, milk, trains, telegraphs, and so on. The State will come to be the Whiteley of England, the heads of Departments the shopwalkers. We shall be forced by Act of Parliament to deal there. From that to dispensing men's incomes, arranging their marriages, allotting the number of their family—these are easy steps. One sees all that.

This will be the most ghastly tyranny the world has ever seen, for it will mean government by experts in the art of governing; government by theorists who have left human nature out of the reckoning. It will be awful—but I am sure it must be faced, and believe that it will be tonic.

Tonic for this reason, that there will be a revolt, since man is happily a choleric animal, and a "panthier when rouged." The old Adam will come out of his new model-dwelling and wallow in the gore of his brother man. Dismembered Fabians will make miry the London streets; the President of the Local Government Board and Chairman of the London County Council will ride, roped together, in a tumbril to the Guillotine in Hyde Park —and all will be well.

Then Anarchy, I hope; then Poverty, Temperance, and Sincerity: *redeunt Saturnia regna*. There's my Cumæan prophecy. Time enough, however, to work out that little programme. We may safely

leave it to our great-great-grandchildren. But to that, I do trust and believe, we shall one day return—to the Golden Age once more. But it doesn't seem to me possible that we can ever drink Liberty at ease until we have gnawed the bitter crusts of Tyranny. Socialism will give us those and to spare: we shall never know the meaning of Freedom until we've had it.

That's to say — after Congregationalism, which sees the world as a society where everybody is rich, and as idle as possible, we shall be ripe, I believe, for Segregationalism, which desires that everybody shall be poor, and earn his right to poverty. The indispensable things to be learned, the absolute conditions of any such return are in these axiomata:

(*a*) The End of Life is the full use of our powers.

(*b*) The use of Government is the securing of that for every one.

(*c*) Education is the fitting of our children to have it.

Once you get these things recognised as fundamental definitions, the rest follows orderly.

The world will be extraordinarily simple then. Geography will no longer be divided into physical and political. There won't be any politics, because there won't be any πόλις—neither domestic (so called), because the Family will be the unit, and not the Nation, nor foreign, because there won't be any foreigners. Wars will cease, because there will be none with whom to war; strikes between Capital

and Labour, because the only Capital will *be* Labour. The strife will be, rather, to be, if possible, poorer than your neighbour. With nothing to tax, there can be no taxes; with no machinery, nobody can be out of work. Such terms as Peace, Progress, and Prosperity will resume their meanings: Peace will again mean peace of mind (since bodily peace will be a condition of life itself), Progress the advance of human faculty, Prosperity the security of the two first. All this is self-evident.

Religion, morals may be left to themselves, when the family is the unit. Tribal religion becomes an absurdity when the tribe disappears; personal religion is all that counts—and we've talked about that. So with morals. Dante and the Schoolmen, who knew their long Italy broken up into ten score of fenced nations, had to deal with morality public and private; and the poor poet must needs fence off compartments in hell to accommodate public or private sinners. Thus, Thou shalt not steal, was a sin if you robbed Vittorio; but if you robbed yourself it might be a virtue. We shan't say that in Saturn's realm. To us insincerity will be the deadly sin: the sins of to-day will be ignorances to-morrow.

But you tell me that there must always be society where there are men, women, and children, since the children will grow up and fall in love, and the men and women will have been in love already, and be very capable of being so again. Family will stray into family, you think—and of course it will. There'll be Love to regulate; and that is the one affair of our

lives (so far as I can see) which won't fall in line behind the fundamentals. Love is (with great respect to divines, monks, doctors, and other bigwigs) the one real, abiding, sincere business of our lives; the root of Art, the principle of Poetry; the single human passion which has the least chance of interfering with money-making or idleness. It used to be said that Religion and Ambition were passions of equal force, but that no longer holds. Religion (as it was then meant) has nearly gone, Ambition has already gone, the way of all flesh. But Love endures, and with it the world still labours towards happiness; and Marriage (which is what it means) has got to be faced.

But not by me, my dear, writing to you. I don't think I can tell you what I think about that just yet. I don't know that I can tell you at all—or ever. If I find that I can, of course I will; or if I find that I must. It seems to me that what my heart is full of must by all means be poured into your lap, to receive the benediction of your hands. I have to talk to you, Sanchia, or die.

Oh, how are you going to read all this? And how I should love to see you at it—your pondering, sea-blue eyes, your wise, considering, doubtful smile! Shall I ever again see you at anything with my bodily eyes? Perhaps not—and Amen, anyhow. I live upon what I can remember of you, and grow by what I hope to remember. Good-bye, good-bye, Sanchia. The day is drawing in. I must light a fire.

It has just struck one. Perhaps I'm quite wrong in all this. Perhaps I ought to join a trades union and agitate for a two hours' day. Or perhaps I ought to be a Liberal member of Parliament and have a country-house. Or would you say, an Imperialist, working for an all-red map of Africa and a Cape-to-Cairo railway? Perhaps the end of all Englishmen should be the preservation intact of this great Empire, on which the sun never sets—or never rises. Which is it? If so, be so good as to tell me by return of post, and I withdraw all that I have ever written to you.

Her answer to this was short and timid. He had opened her eyes perhaps too wide. And yet she must have them open soon. If he was not to talk to her of marriage, for instance! Was it not certain that somebody else would? It was practically certain. Therefore he must tell her what he thought of that. She more than hinted at it; she almost said it when she wrote, "I wish I could talk to you—though I don't know how to do it. But you always understand me, even if I say nothing. There are all sorts of difficulties about one as one grows up. I do want to know what you really think about some of them." And then she adds, "I am to be presented next week. Rather foolish, but mamma insists. And then I am 'out'! It's getting like Spring now. I should like to be 'out' in quite another sense."

CHAPTER XV

SANCHIA KISSES HANDS—AND IS HANDLED BY THE WORLD

It is true that Sanchia went to Court, and made her curtsey to the Queen; for after the turn of the year changes had taken place in the Percival household. Hawise, Lady Pinwell, being out of the way, either in Pinwell or in Halkin Street as the case may have required, her sister Melusine became engaged to a Mr. Gerald Scales, who was brother to a baronet, though, most unfortunately, not in any likelihood of "coming by his own," as Mrs. Percival put it. There were many children born to Sir Timothy Scales, of whom three were sons. But still it was very well. Gerald—"our dear Gerald—the soul of chivalry," was a prosperous gentleman, and prosperous without efforts of his own; which is such a hall-mark, which stamps you at once. Melusine was fortunate—but with such a figure, with such grace, who could wonder? "Dearest mamma," the fair girl said, as she leaned her cheek to be kissed or patted, "how sweet you are to me. Between you and Gerald I shall be spoilt." But Vicky said that between mamma and Melusine and Gerald she felt old-fashioned; so she cast her eyes about her and did calculations in her pretty head. Mr. Pon-

sonby Thorne was much too old, of course; before he could look at the *menu* he had to get out his *pince-nez*, and then to wipe them, and then to have fearful struggles with the chain. Besides, *do* you look at the *menu* at all unless you're really old? On the other hand, Mr. Phipps—Mr. Frederick Apsley Phipps—was too young. He got glossy about the eyes when he shook hands, and never knew whether you were going to shake hands with him or not, which was such a bore. And even if you put a hyphen in and called yourself Apsley-Phipps (which lots of people did, and there was nothing in it)—even then *Phipps* sounded like a pigeon with a cold. Phipps, Phipps! You could hear the poor bird wheezing it. Oh, no, *he* wouldn't do. Besides, *Frederick* was the name for a fair-haired man, as everybody knew—blue eyes and fair hair—no, not red hair like Mr. Ingram's, Sancie's friend. Now Mr. Frederick Phipps was very dark, and pale. On the whole she inclined to Captain Sinclair, who had two beautiful names—Cuthbert and Sinclair. And that was all. Vicky said that you must either have *one* Christian name, or *three*. Two was vulgar.

All these things being so, it was considered time for Sanchia to take her place in society, and she was duly presented at the end of March. She took it with philosophy, was neither elated nor depressed; but I beg leave (with all respect to Mr. Senhouse's feelings) to say that she contemplated herself more than once in the dressmaker's cheval-glass, and more than once or twice in her father's fond eyes

with a good deal of quiet satisfaction. Vicky's outspoken, "Why, my dear, you could go—perfectly well—without any stays at all," is the sort of thing any girl will thrill to believe. And from Vicky, too, whose figure was beyond reproach! Her hair looked lovely, simply lovely, Vicky told her; and the feathers gave her height, which she may have wanted. Vicky thought she did. "You're frightfully severe, you know, frightfully chaste and all that sort of thing; but an inch or two makes all the difference in the world." Sanchia laughed at her, but I think she liked it.

She sent Senhouse her photograph, which showed her stiff in her glories of plumes and satin. He acknowledged it with pleasant irony. "My frozen lady," he called her; "my saint in a feretory"; and *Nuestra Señora del Paso*, Our Lady of the Procession. "I wonder very much at this moment," he says, "about the Brauronion in Athens. That was a great day, you know, for Artemis the Bright. There were processions of unwedded girls in crocus-coloured tunics; the tallest of them carried Artemis herself, Artemis of Brauron; all the others—what do you think? Little bears. Why little bears? Why, in the name of Glory, little bears? I can answer that. Don't you know about Callisto, who is now the Great Bear in the sky? Some day I'll tell you. She had a lot to do with it. But what led me on to this was the consideration whether they decked the Goddess for the procession in feathers and fal-lals and made her look as stiff and startled

at once as you look here. Your eyes, my dear one, are quite round—like the O of Giotto. You look as if you hadn't winked them for an hour. When they fixed in the final feather and turned you to the looking-glass, you said 'Oh!' and at that moment the frost came down and stuck you at Oh! for ever. It's charming, as the showman said, but it's not Emily. . . . All the same, I wish I had been in the Mall among the loafers to see you sedate beside mamma, your plumed head nodding at the window; all the crowd jostling to behold you, nudging each other and saying, 'There's a little beauty.' Shrewd judges those crowds of the Mall, I fancy. They have a great deal of stored experience, you see, being descendants of the fellows who saw your great-grandmother go up to kiss the hand of Queen Charlotte or Queen Adelaide, as the case may have been."

He receives her accounts of subsequent gaieties with relish—not a trace of grudging in any of his letters; he was quite without the sense of property in any person or thing. He asks after her "swains," as he calls them—her "young Mr. Dartrey," or her "martial Ingram," or a musical acquaintance, a M. Sergius Polschkin. With this gentleman, who swims vigorously for a while in the correspondence, he makes great play. He dubs him variously Apollo, Apolloschkin, Apollo's kin, Apollo's skin, and, by a sequence of ideas, Marsyas. He sends him Russian greetings, affects to believe him a spy of the autocracy come to entice him back to Siberia. "Assure him that he shall have me," he bids her,

"on condition that he puts me south of Lake Balkash. That's where I want to look for irises. It will be handy, too, between you and me, for Turkestan —and Thibet, whither I shall certainly escape when I've collected my roots. I have long wanted to cross Thibet and see the Himalayas. But don't tell Marsyas this, there's a dear." He's a lover; it's obvious in every word; but he's a very gallant and loyal lover.

Undoubtedly the time had come when Sanchia swung into ken, and began to have her satellites, revolving and fixed. I wish I could record them all —there's humour to be got out of them—but it's impossible. M. Polschkin, for instance, has been described as swimming vigorously. He did more than that; he splashed, and became rather a bore. This young Russian, his emotions very near the surface, emptied himself without disguise in froth at her feet. Vicky, you remember, called him Fluffy, detecting his frothiness; but it was all very serious to him. He wanted Sanchia badly, and cared not who knew it. In consequence, everybody knew it. Vicky said it was really almost indecent to hear him at the piano sing "*Ich liebe dich!*" in dreamy, sighing half-tones, with glimmering eyes which did not disdain the aid of tears. He would afterwards stand fainting by the door and speak to anybody about Sanchia. And as he spoke of her and his desire he wept freely. At times he almost raved; at times he scowled at her with folded arms. Nevile

Ingram once called him a damned fool, and he was pleased, and struck his breast, and said fiercely, "Yes, you are quite right—you, with your English 'ammersledge. I am a dam fool—I am a love-foolish, love-bedrunken man—what you call 'alf-seas." "That's what we call it," Ingram had replied cheerfully, "and I advise you to keep your hair on." Whereat M. Polschkin had gripped his locks with both hands and howled like a wolf at sundown.

She bore it—her first affair of the kind, remember, however absurd—exemplarily, as if it were a specimen of the common lot of women; she bore it to the extent even of not seeming to be aware of the ridiculous figure he made of her with his everlasting postures. If you have ever seen one of those boxes of puppets worked by sand, where a maiden in Swiss costume stands with faintly twitching feet confronted by a shepherd in knee-breeches jerking madly, you will have some idea of the state of the case. No cardboard girl of the Grisons twitched more delicately than she; but there is this significant fact to be noted: she dropped M. Polschkin out of her letters to Senhouse, and he found his jokes about Marsyas and Lake Balkash unechoed. She was, in fact, very sick at heart over this silly business, and glad enough to dismiss it from her memory.

Ingram's suit—if it was a suit—was far more serious. He worked with infinite discretion, admirable patience: to Chevenix it was most serious. "I can understand flirtations—most of 'em," he

said, "and I tumble to spoons like a partridge to number fives, but this sort of thing beats the cocks." He alluded to lectures at the Royal Institution—real lectures there, not of the sort he chose for Vicky—and by them who would extend University teaching to South Kensington; he alluded to visits to the British Museum, and to the spectacle of Ingram immaculately dressed, carrying camp-stool and painting materials across the park in the early mornings. And once he found the pair in a hansom on the Embankment, "moored up against the kerb," he cried aghast, "like a bargee on Chelsea Beach," painting mud and sea-gulls against a blood-red West. His conclusion was that old Nevile had "got it bad," and that the thing must be stopped. The worst of it was that Ingram was changed, and very short with his friend. Invited by Chevenix to "have it out" at the Coffee-Tree, he gruffly declined. "Look here, William, my son," he had replied, "I know what I'm doing, and ain't such a cad as you think me. You may leave me alone, if you please."

Chevenix was very grave. "If any harm comes out of this, Nevile," he said, "I'll never forgive myself; but I shall lick you first."

Ingram levelled his eyes. "You shall," he said. "You have my leave."

Thereafter followed public demonstrations and private dances, Hurlingham, Private Views, and what not, visible to the naked eye, and evening communion in the schoolroom of Great Cumberland Place, when the lamp was lighted and the books

were got out, and the crowned young head and the sleek cropped head were bent together over the *Vita Nuova*, and sometimes hands touched between the pages of the dictionary, and sometimes hand folded over hand and stayed so. These phenomena were, as Chevenix ruefully admitted to himself, "invisible at Greenwich"; and the sometime cheerful youth was stricken with remorse. "I can't keep it up; I can't, I can't," he told himself. "Sancie's a darling—and I can't." He bore it, however, for another few weeks.

Vicky Percival, who loved and admired her younger sister more, much more, than she would have admitted, watched during these spring months, with the appreciative eyes of Twenty-two, the doings of Twenty. Appreciative yet careful eyes, for as she said, "You never know—*never*." The rise and dissolution in spume of poor M. Polschkin had her entire approval; she confessed that Sancie's handling of the youth had been masterly. "I couldn't have done it better myself, mamma," she said. "It's one of the most difficult things in the world to let a man make a perfect fool of himself, and pretend you don't care. Because, of course, you do care—awfully."

"Sanchia," said Mrs. Percival, "has had the education of a gentlewoman. At least, I take leave to hope so. Fräulein is to be trusted."

"I do wish you wouldn't call Sancie names, mamma," said Vicky. "You know—perfectly well—that we're only called gentlewomen when we're

decayed. There's an institution for them where they sell comforters. Fräulein's a gentlewoman now —if you like. Decayed—my word! But Sancie! Really, you know, mamma, you're too hard on Sancie sometimes. You don't like her, and——"

Mrs. Percival's eyes were now shut. "Can a woman's tender care—?" she had begun; but Vicky would have none of that.

"If it *hasn't* ceased, then," she said with vehemence, "I wish you'd look after Mr. Ingram. I loathe him."

Mrs. Percival opened her eyes. "Mr. Ingram?" She was surprised. "You dislike Mr. Ingram? He is one of the most earnest-minded young men I know. He is full of tact, most anxious to improve himself. I understand that Wanless is exquisite. The gardens are a show place."

"The gardens, mamma!" cried Vicky. "I thought we were talking about Sancie. You don't want *her* to be a show place, do you?"

Mrs. Percival could stand a good deal from a bold enemy, but now she was at bay. "I think you forget yourself, my dear child," she said in a very lofty manner. "If you have anything to tell me, which is not mere abuse of your mother and your mother's friends, I will listen to it. So far you have been flippant—and unamusing. I must ask you to let me get on with my letters. I have a heavy morning before me."

"Very well, mamma," said Vicky, who must have the last word. "I'll go. I fancy you may

have a heavier morning one of these days, but however——"

It was difficult to talk to Sancie about her affairs, because the child was so simple about them, and had such powers of silence. "Like him? Of course I do," she used to say. "I like him very much. And I don't understand you. What *should* he mean?"

"Well," Vicky cried, "you don't suppose he reads Dante with you because he wants to know what it's all about!"

Sanchia, grave-eyed, said, "I certainly do suppose it. That's why everybody reads Dante, I expect." And then Vicky appealed to Heaven and Earth. "But nobody reads Dante, my darling child! Nobody in the world but you! Absurd!"

"But Mr. Ingram reads it," Sanchia said with arched brows. Really, Sancie was impossible. She was exactly like mamma—in her way, of course; she saw what she chose to see.

The Easter holidays came and went, and now we were in May, and the season was upon us. The John Chevenixes gave an evening party in Chesterfield Gardens, which was the greatest success. Vicky knew that she was "all right," because Captain Sinclair said so—and looked it; and as for Sancie, she was a tea-rose. Vicky, of course, had her hands full; what with Apsley Phipps, who was "no good," but refused to see it, and Captain Sinclair, and a friend of his, a Major Scott, her hands

were very full, but yet she had eyes everywhere, and saw every dance that Sancie danced, and every dance that she didn't, too. She herself only sat out one —so stern was the sense of duty upon her—and that one was with Bill Chevenix, who didn't count. A momentous sitting-out it proved to be. More of it in its place.

Sanchia was also sitting out—with Ingram. She was sitting in the conservatory under a palm. There had been a Chinese lantern swinging under the branches, but Ingram, on a previous visit, had put it out. "I hate those things, don't you?" he had said, and taken no more notice of it.

She was sitting very quietly, with an elbow on the arm of her chair; she was nursing her cheek. Her free hand was in her lap, and the fan was swinging in it, up and down. Ingram sat by her, elbows to knees, and spoke in a hard, constrained voice.

"Whether I go or stay, I'm a better man for having known you. I've got a chance. I've thought more, felt more, learned more than I ever thought possible. I don't know what it is about you—a high head, a high heart, clear eyes—I don't understand it at all. Where you get it—how you come to be—right down out of Heaven, it seems to me—but there it is—so much to the good. I take things as I find 'em pretty much; I'm like that, always was. I don't inquire, as a rule. But this is a wonderful thing; I tell you fairly, I don't understand it. You seem to light things up—from inside—somehow. Poetry now! Poetry! We used to do literature at

school. Used to get turned on to *Lycidas*, and—let's get it right—*Ode on Intimations of Immortality derived from*—no, no, I can't do it even now. What a title for a poem, eh? No, but what I mean is this. You illuminate these things for me—they glow; I can see inside. And they're splendid—they really are splendid. I could go on for hours and hours. I go home after those readings, you know, feeling as if I had wings—sort of wings." He looked at her, sitting there so still, so merged in wonder; he touched her hand. "You've done this for me," he said, "and I'm much obliged to you. You don't know what you've done, of course. I don't think I can tell you. But I will tell you this. If I leave this place, as I think I shall in about ten minutes, I shall say as I go, 'Now let thy servant depart in peace,' like they do in church. And I shall mean it. And it won't be peace by any means; but I shall go."

He had her hand in his own, and it was very still. From one heart to another fleeted silent eloquent messengers, to and fro, passing and repassing each other as they bore their news. Presently she said, not moving, nor looking his way, "Why must you go?"

He remained sunk in thought. You could see the muscles of his face twitching like telegraphic needles. He was at a cross-road.

He jerked himself suddenly together; he picked up her hand, stooped, and kissed it. "I'm going," he said, "because I must. You've made a man of me, which is more than my mother succeeded in doing. God bless you, Sancie, and good-bye."

He left her directly, and strode through the rooms, looking neither right nor left. He passed Vicky without seeing her white face, and gained his hat and coat, and the night.

Vicky presently came breathless into the conservatory.

"Sancie," she said, "I'm going. You must come too."

Sanchia, without moving, said, "I'm quite ready." Vicky watched her, breathing very fast.

"Look here, darling," she said, "has Mr. Ingram gone?"

Her sister's woe-begone eyes gave her the answer. Homes of injury they seemed, homes of reproach.

But Vicky's case was urgent. She *must* know more. This was no time for reticence.

"Did he tell you why he went?"

"No," said Sanchia. "He said he must go."

"He told you nothing more?"

"No, nothing more." And then she grew white and looked frightened. "Oh, Vicky," she said, "let's go home."

She hardly spoke in the brougham, and Vicky, relieved on the great question, did not press her. The man was gone, anyhow! She acted with all kindness; took Sanchia's hand, and kept it till they were home; went upstairs with her, hovered, suggested comforts of sorts, proposed herself as bedfellow. But Sanchia had recovered command of her soul, and refused all such comforts. She locked

her heart up and pocketed the key; she smiled, and was very cool. The cheek she gave to Vicky was wholesome and fresh. "Good-night, dear one," she said. "I shall sleep like a top. I'm nearly asleep now." So Vicky finally went, and Sanchia, white in her dismay, unlocked her stricken young heart and fondled it, nursing her wound.

Vicky knocked at the door of her mother's room, and waited until it was opened by that bored lady. "Let me come in, mamma," she said; "I've got something to tell you." She entered as she spoke.

"It's very inconvenient—" Mrs. Percival began.

"It is, mamma—most inconvenient. But it might be worse—at least, I suppose so. I've come to tell you that Mr. Ingram left the Chevenixes without telling Sancie why. That's quite as well. And now I'll tell you that he has a wife somewhere in Sicily, and that there ought to have been a divorce, but there hasn't been."

"Good Heavens!" said Mrs. Percival; "good Heavens!"

"Occasionally Heaven *is* good," said Vicky. "Better than we deserve. But I think that will do for the present. The poor darling knows nothing about it—and will get over it, I suppose. She's been asked to Gorston, I happen to have found out. I advise you to let her go there at once. Good-night, mamma."

CHAPTER XVI

GORSTON—WITH A DIFFERENCE

KNOWING herself wounded, she sped to Gorston, her hand clapped to her heart; but she had written to Senhouse to say that she was going there in such a way, with such omissions, as to reveal to him that she wanted him. "I am going to Gorston," she said, "but I suppose you won't be there this time. I shall be glad to be away from London for a little, to look at flowers, and sketch, and do other wholesome things." That had been all, and more than a lyrical outpouring could have been to one who had a harp of his own. Early as she got there, she learned of him as entrenched, and as she stood after luncheon at the open French window, inhaling peace and balm, behold him—the loose-limbed and keen—with his flapping neckwear and sandalled feet, swinging over the lawn, his welcome in his eyes. She was very much moved when she gave him her hand. "Oh!" she murmured, "oh! how lovely it is going to be." He had no more to say —couldn't trust himself.

The Bill Hill household was abroad, playing golf at Biarritz. Senhouse had, therefore, proposed himself to old Lady Mauleverer, who suffered him gladly.

"Certainly, you shall have the run of your teeth—if you will accept of it," she had told him; "and in any case the keepers have been informed that the woods are to be saved. I suppose that will meet your case. Pray let me see you when you arrive *in your gig*." She received him with a semi-sincere formality which he relished. She was in her usual black silk—cut of 1840—and white lace. "Well, Master Vagabond, so you've come?" "So please your ladyship—" "And how, my friend, have you come?" asked her ladyship, who had filaments of dead tongues about her still, "*Recte si possis! si non*—I suppose." Senhouse nodded, grinning. And then, "Let us understand each other, my dear Senhouse," said she. "Of course you know that she's coming here?" He nodded again. "Yes, I know she is." "Now," said my lady, "she's too young for you, in my opinion, and much too respectable. However, if she beguiles you into settling down into common decency, I daresay her virtues may be sacrificed. But that ought to be quite understood beforehand. And will you tell me what you propose to do with her?" "Bless you," said Senhouse. "I propose to make her as happy as possible. I propose exactly what you propose. What do you take me for?" But the lady was not so to be evaded. "That's nonsense, my dear man. You *don't* propose what I propose. You propose to make love to her—that's what you propose."

"I propose to do nothing of the sort, with great respect," Senhouse replied. "I believe I would

sooner cut my foot off. I propose, on the contrary, to conceal the facts, as I take them to be, that she's an angel of light and myself unworthy to tie her shoestring. I propose to interest her in vastly more important things than the state of my liver—for they tell me that love affects that organ, and not the heart, as is popularly supposed. I read in her letters that she is suffering from London sickness. She has been danced too much, supped too often; she has heard too much chatter, and wonders if the real world is still pulsing along—out here in the quiet green places. Well, I propose to show her that it does. I've been in your woods sixteen hours, and this morning, before you were awake, I made friends with a bitch-fox. I was introduced to the family —four of them. She shall get to know them, too. That'll be better for her than to talk of men about town."

"I agree with you," said Lady Mauleverer, who added after a moment, "Don't make too much fuss with her. You'll turn her head. She'll have to be married some day." "Of course she will," says he, "when she's found a hero." Lady Mauleverer made him stay to dinner.

For the first day or so it seemed that the last year's glamour was returned. Enchanting weather worked its old spell. The recollected young lady of fashion suffered a wood-change, the staid sheath opened and the Dryad came forth, free-bosomed, bare-footed, heedless, and untouched. The Gorston

oaks knew her; the Gorston beeches dappled her with light; she peered by the lily-pool and flushed her remembered delight; she was abroad in the morning dew, and in sober mood listened while he talked to her in the charmed evening light. With him, her excitement shining in her eyes and welling from her parted lips, she made acquaintance with the brown bitch-fox, who, reclining in luxurious ease, demurely kept her staring yellow eyes upon the furry bundles at her dugs, but allowed herself to be caressed, and to have her treasures rifled one by one; and stretched her legs out to the full, and extended her claws to the compliments she received. Sanchia, for that half hour, had but one desire in her heart, to make a friend of this mother of foxes. "Oh, do look at me, you darling; oh, please do! You know I wouldn't hurt you for the world. You know I wouldn't hurt you!" But Senhouse had to explain. "She won't look at either of us. Not she. After that first blank gaze of encounter, I never knew a wild thing that would look at you again. A dog will do it—and that's a sign. A monkey does it—in the zoo—but not to see you, mind. They look round about your eyes. They pore over you as one gazes at the sky. To my mind, that's a certainty that we and they aren't akin. There must have come a gleam between us. But there never has." "And there's none between us and the sky either," said Sanchia softly. He laughed. "No, no. We're not related. What's worse—we can't get at flowers either, where there's

much more reason to expect it. We woo and mate and breed and nourish just in the same way—but there it is. We in our cage, and they in theirs. We may love and look and like, but we can't speak. Our tongues are tied, my dear." "Are they?" echoed Sanchia softly. "Are they tied? I suppose they are."

At that season of the opening year, when the bird of love, darkling in covert, grieves musically day and night, when in wood-bottoms the bluebells show like a skyey film shed upon earth, and when every morning's soft wind renews the hopefulness of every evening's quiet, Senhouse spent himself in the honour of his love. In the forest—she seated with her camp-stool and drawing-block—he would pad the spread beech-mast, where bright green wood-sorrel, starred with its pencilled flowers, is the only verdure in a russet sea, up and down, up and down, hands deep in pockets, eyes rapt, or restless, peering to inquire and to see; and he would talk to her fast and fiercely of everything in Heaven or beneath it. Men, women, beasts; thrones, dominions, and powers—yes, he spent himself in her honour. For everything reduced itself to her denomination; he did not pretend to see anything now but in relation to her. He had no reticences about his prime factor, did not conceal his utter love for her. It would have been a hindrance to his tongue, and absurd also. So the day dawned when he threw all his chances at her feet. "I have no rights, and plead none which are not every man's who has ever

met you. The right to love you, you can't deny me —nor would you if you could. Liberty to walk in the light you throw—liberty to aim at the high mark you lift up. They belong to all the world—you can't deny your divinity. The Queen might as well refuse to be called Majesty. That thing's not thinkable. And now let's see what you're making of the bluebell bottom." He always broke off in that fashion, never held to his note, lest she might be tempted by pity to comfort him. She heard him after this inconsequent fashion more than once; he never gave her a chance of replying. Sometimes she fancied that he didn't want her to reply.

As of old, he charmed, interested, flattered, and excited her. He opened vistas, he blew sweet air into close recesses, he stimulated her pride and curiosity at once. But the heart of a child is a fitful organ; and the wind bloweth as it listeth through the strings. Some chord in hers was left unthrilled; there was no melodious response. That had been blown through her and out of her by another eager breath. She could listen only to that.

He discerned it, and resigned himself to the honour that remained to him, barren though it was to be—the honour high and open to love her only. He called himself philosopher, but he was a wild extremist in such a matter. Not Dante himself transcendentalised his Beatrice to more ethereal substance than he his Sanchia. Literally, towards her at this hour he felt no drawings of his members:

he craved no touch of her, neither of the hands nor the lips; nor any long sight when her eyes were upon his. To his extravagant fancy the fond gazing of lovers seemed an unholy secret. As Moses covered his eyes before the Bush, so he before her burning youth. To him she had no parts, but was all a glory of Essence, of wondrous pure Being. Had she thawed by some sudden kindling and thrown herself sobbing in his arms, I doubt whether, at this hour, he would have dared to clasp her. As for kissing—not for him, not for him, the frail marvel of her lips. And yet he was a man. much of a man, and had lived as a man must (if he is to find himself so). Love's course was curbed; love's course was to be—man's; but at this hour he saw her sexless, "a lovely lady garmented in light." To such as he was, one does not lay hands upon one's father Parmenides, nor upon the Mother and Adoration of the Christians. Artemis might kiss Endymion if she pleased; but Hippolytus went veiled when she brought him to her Sanctuary to minister.

She never spoke of Ingram to him, though from her broken hints of London ways and days he guessed at Ingram's likes. She was talking once of the difficulty of keeping simple up there in London. "It's all right," she said, "if everybody's simple too, and sees things as you do. But they're not, you see, and then you are made sorry. They are dreadfully complicated. You get imposed upon, in a way." He heard her miserably; avenues of horror

opened up for moments at a time; he had a vision of her white and abandoned, shocked to the soul. But his courage shut them down, and his loyalty came up radiant. "Have no fear," he told her; "be yourself. Nothing can harm you then—nothing whatsoever. With faith you can remove mountains, they say—and that may be true. What is certain is, that by sincerity you can stand through earthquake and eclipse. I can't handle Goodness like Plato, as if it were a sphere. I believe in Goodness as such, though I don't know its specific gravity; but what I do know about it is that when a woman with it in her goes out to war against a man (say) with the other raging in him, she always wins. Always, always. The thing is adamant—absolutely devil-proof. Take my word for it, Queen Mab." She looked him her gratitude and rewarded him sevenfold.

But London, her responsibilities, or something, had sobered her; she was not the Fairy Queen she had been. He put it down to "growing pains," shades of the prison house. She excused herself from hearing poetry, for instance, even *his* poetry, telling him that her mind wanted grinding. He was to find her rougher material, something gritty. Recognising the sanity of the choice, he overhauled his tattered classics, rejected Thoreau and Marcus Aurelius, that mild-mannered Caesar whom he called Zeno in a frock-coat, and chose for Epictetus himself. The extravagant common-sense of the free slave was tonic, and yet harmless, since it was quite impossible of attainment.

"*Seek not to have things happen as you choose them, but rather choose them to happen as they do; and so shall you live prosperously. . . . Lameness is a hindrance of the leg, not of the will.*"

Glorious, immortal platitude!

"Oh, my Sanchia, grieving after I know not what, listen now to this: '*But when shall I see Athens again, and the Acropolis?*' Thus the pupil.

"'*Wretched man,*' storms the sage, '*doth not that satisfy thee which thou canst see every day? Hast thou aught better to see, or greater, than the sun, moon, stars, this earth, the sea? How should'st thou have aught in common with Socrates, dying as he died, living as he lived? Dost thou suppose him lamenting, or in a rage, because he should see such a man no more, or such a woman?*'"

All unconscious how that shot might go, and glowing with its magnificent simplicity, he could never have told from his Sanchia's eyes, diligent upon her painting, how short he had come of the mark. Troubled little Sanchia! *Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*, might she say.

But Epictetus did very well, preventing searchings of heart.

Towards the end of the first week of her fortnight the elation with which she had begun it died down; she grew rather restless. Then she received a letter from Ingram which asked for an interview. He wrote, "It is a good deal to ask of you, I know. I hope you will be able to agree, all the same. I

have seen your people, who were extremely kind. I can't suppose that you will be less so." What that might mean she did not understand, but she replied favourably. She would be very glad to see him, she said, and was returning on such and such a day. Not an earlier day than she had first intended; she did not choose for that. Her plans were respectable things in her eyes, not to be varied except for extraordinary occasions. An access of friendliness to Senhouse was the immediate result of this correspondence. It was as if she felt herself suddenly free to be natural; as a new convert to Catholicism will permit himself liberties of speech, and handle God more familiarly than before—from the safe shelter of the pinfold. Thus our poor friend's spell of bliss had a serene close.

As before, his going preceded hers. He was for Mosedale in Cumberland, to look after his gardening, or reap its fruits; and she saw him go. But his reward had been bestowed upon him overnight, when she had been very tender, given him her hand, called him her friend.

And then he had said, "If you mean what you say—and I know that you do—I shall claim a friend's wages."

"I'll pay you—if I can," she told him.

"I do think you should," he said. "Supposing that I'm any use to you—supposing that I know a thing or two about life, about you, which you don't know—why, give me a chance to tell you what I know. When you find yourself in a fix, send for me.

When you think I can be of use, do me the honour of using me. Send for me at any hour of day or night, and I come direct. I can always be found. Charnock knows where I am—and so do you, I fancy. I generally tell you when I write—and now I always shall. You can't miss me possibly—and you can make me singularly happy by doing that. Even if I'm no real service to you, I think I'll ask you for that promise. Put it that it'll be a real service to me, and you'll be nearer the truth." She was pleased, there's no doubt; yet slow to promise.

"You know that I always tell you my troubles.

"No, I don't, my dear. I wish I did. I'm pretty sure, indeed, that you don't."

Now, that couldn't be denied. He went on, "I haven't asked you to do that—and I shan't. It would be insufferable to ask it, ridiculous to expect it. It's only when you think that I can be of use. I leave you to judge. Willingly."

She said, "Of course I should ask you then. Do you want me to promise?"

He looked up at her. "I do, my dear."

She stooped and touched his forehead with her lips. "Then I do promise," she told him, and he was content—or believed that he was.

Their actual parting lacked the romance of last year's. He deprived himself of that deliberately —for her sake and his own. Besides, he wished to keep undimmed the memory of her kiss. He said his farewells at the front door, like a visitor,

and Lady Mauleverer, her arm within the girl's, waved him the braver farewell. Sanchia did not lift her hand, but looked her speeding.

Soon afterwards she went home to Great Cumberland Place.

CHAPTER XVII

MRS. PERCIVAL IS STAUNCH TO THE IDEA

When Mr. William Chevenix came up to explain himself in Great Cumberland Place, he found that there was a good deal to explain. He was a simple youth, for all that he was not so simple as he seemed; but he quite appreciated the difficulty there may be in accounting for a thing of the kind. Put it this way: If it had never entered his head to refer to Mr. Ingram's marriage, why did he open darkly of it to Vicky in a retired corner? If it had always been at the back of his mind from the beginning, why had he kept it there so long? The dilemma was implied in every muscle of Mrs. Percival's stiff neck and in every pucker of Mr. Percival's troubled face, and was cause of great torment to Mr. Chevenix's soul.

But as he writhed before his judges, the mere instinct to find ease urged his wits, and he did succeed in rounding upon them. This was how he put it. "Of course I've know Nevile for years—for years and years. We were at the same dame-school, you know, and went up to Eton the same term. And of course I knew he was married, when I'd been best man and all that, and had dined with

him the night before, and drunk his health—which was always first-class—and happiness, which I jolly well knew he wouldn't get. Couldn't, you know, with *her!* I admit all that; but what beats me now is this. What's Nevile done in particular that makes you so down on him? I give you my word, that when I told Miss Vicky about it I'd forgotten that she hadn't danced at the wedding. I vow that I had. What I said was this. She had some flowers on, d'ye see? Stephanotis. I said, snuffing the air, 'You remind me of Claire; she always wore that stuff.' Miss Vicky pricks up her ears—oh, she's sharp! I see that now. 'Who's Claire?' she says, like a captain's bell; and I stare. 'Why, Mrs. Nevile,' I say; '*you* know.' Then I see how she looks at me. 'Yes,' she says, 'I do know—at last.' I assure you that's how it went. Now, you know, I might have said that the very first time I spoke about Nevile, and you wouldn't have thought anything of it. And why do you now? What's he done? Nothing that I know of. If he has, of course I take the blame. But has he? That's the point, you see, Mrs. Percival."

It was not the point, but he made it so in his need. Nobody present could charge Ingram with anything except a fondness for study in Sanchia's company—a fondness for study which she shared. Nobody in the household could charge him either, for Vicky's surmises were based upon her unconcealed dislike of the man. There was only one person, in fact, who could have anything to say, and she, it

was plain to Chevenix, and his enormous consolation, could neither be asked to say it nor got to say it. "Sancie will stick to her friends, don't you fear," the astute sufferer told himself.

The Percival pair saw the point quite well. Mr. Percival, who had never made any charges against his beloved, now grew very red in the face; Mrs. Percival, who, perhaps, had made too many, moistened her lips.

It was she who spoke first. "I make no charges, Mr. Chevenix; pray do not misunderstand me. We have always been glad to receive your friend. He has been welcome; I hope he is aware of that. But it's as well to know where we stand. I gather that Mrs. Ingram does not reside—is not at present in——"

"No, she doesn't," replied Mr. Chevenix. "No, she isn't, and isn't likely to be. She lives in Sicily, I believe—or she did." After a pause he thought it well to say, with a final air, "She's no good, you know."

"What do you mean by that, Chevenix?" asked Mr. Percival, and added to his wife, "Must get to the bottom of it, my dear."

Then Mr. Chevenix explained that his friend Nevile's wife was separated from her husband, and had left him within a year of marriage. As he put it, Ingram was an injured man. "There were faults on both sides, no doubt. Nevile's temper is queer—oh, *queer!* And there were racketings, I daresay—a man can't talk of these things very well. But this I will say"—and his voice gained clearness with confidence as it touched the moral

heights—"that there was no doubt at all about Mrs. Nevile—oh, none! She was a bad one. Not only talked about, understand—Lord, no! It was known, positively known. There was Charley— Oh, one can't go into it!" No one wanted to go into it less than troubled Mr. Percival, who said, "Let it alone, Chevenix."

Chevenix was grateful. "Thanks!" he said, and turned to his friend's virtues. "Mind you, Mrs. Percival, it's to Nevile's credit, very greatly to his credit, that he's made no fuss. He's been content to abide by his bargain. He's said, 'I was a wrong-headed young fool; but I won't make it worse by dragging a woman through the mud.' And he hasn't. He's allowanced her and let her rip—let her alone, you know. Now," he added, looking from one to the other for a sympathetic verdict, "now, what's the worst thing Nevile's done since? All he's done has been to get what he can out of what's left. And you'll allow me to say, Mrs. Percival, that if he's got the benefit of your society, you know, he's done about the best thing there was to do."

He was a good advocate under the rack. Mrs. Percival was certainly moved. Mr. Percival was not.

"That's all very well, Chevenix," he said heavily. "I'm not one to be down on a man who's made a fool of himself. But he mustn't make a fool of my daughter. Because I call that making a knave of himself—if you ask me."

Mrs. Percival was now shocked. Strung to enthusiasm by the candour of a Chevenix, she could

not relish this city touch. It was under the goad of her husband—so painfully, to her mind, the plain British merchant—that she soared out of his reach into an upper air.

She raised her head, she smiled; the light of faith gleamed in her eyes. "I can trust my girls," she said, thrilling—"I can trust my girls!"

Now how was poor Mr. Percival to contend that she could not, without seeming to smirch the white robe of his darling? He was left speechless by his wife, just as she had been by Mr. Chevenix.

Mrs. Percival, it has been hinted, had, to an almost superhuman degree, the power of believing what she wanted to believe. Her desires, aspirations, whatever they were, seemed to come to her with a divine sanction upon them, which made doubt or denial impious. So, at least, she must have entertained them. They lifted her to that serener air where nothing was incredible, where, as she would remind you, Faith is melted into Sight. Here was a case exactly in point. She liked Mr. Ingram; she respected his birth and begetting. He was Ingram of Wanless; she respected his wealth and standing; she admired all that he represented. He was good style, good form, knew the right people, and took as a matter of course things which to her were matters of striving and contrivance. And she loved her daughters, and loved them to love the things which she thought loveworthy. If county birth and long descent, if high education and the service of one's country in arms, were not loveworthy,

let her daughters hide beneath her wings until the hawk-like shadow were passed over. But were they not? Was not the young man a patrician by every mark? Was not his very mating a sign of that? His wife—deplorable, if you please—had been a Pierpoint; she had been Claire Pierpoint. Did not everybody know the Pierpoints? Entertainers of Royalty, familiars of the reigning house! If these were not marks of distinction, let her daughters cower; but if they were—as were they not?—let them show of what stuff they were made. Ever pressing forward to the mark of our high calling! When had she held back from that? And were they not flesh of her flesh, bone of her bone? Could she dare think otherwise? or could she do otherwise than lift her head at the mere hint? Therefore she said, "I can trust my girls!" and smiled mystically towards the cornice.

Enthusiasm is catching; Mr. William Chevenix caught it. "That's stunning of you, Mrs. Percival. I say, but that's fine, you know." He got up and stood before her; she extended her hand to him, both her hands. It was an emotional moment. She gulped; her voice was broken. She said, "My darling is to be trusted. And who can say what power there may not be in the pure mind of a Christian child?" To which Mr. Chevenix had no more apt reply handy than, "By Jove, no!"

The consequence of this moving scene was that Nevile Ingram, by invitation, paid Mrs. Percival

a morning call, and was received in the morning-room. He was in a sober mood, and spoke like a gentleman.

"I don't attempt to excuse myself," he said; "but it was a long time ago. If I have succeeded in forgetting something of it, it's lucky for me. I married her when I was one-and-twenty, and she left me on my twenty-second birthday—on that very day. One can't forget such things, of course, but one does one's best. I was badly hit, you may understand. I travelled a lot; went round the world, twice to India, once to Central Africa; crossed the Rockies, and all that kind of thing. I never really settled down at Wanless till this time last year—but now I mean to sit tight up there. One has duties of sorts, you know. If I forgot what I had hanging round my neck, you ought not to blame me—it's been your fault, largely, and I'm grateful. Your girls have opened my eyes—they've taught me things which I never expected to know even the outside of. Better things than hunting and globe-trotting—sounder things than them. There's your daughter Philippa, now—Mrs. Tompsett-King. She's been a good angel to me—I hold to that—wonderful!" Mrs. Percival, through a mist of tears, smiled gently upon him, nodding her head. This was exactly what she wanted. He continued the vein.

"I'm pretty lonely, you know. I was an only child—and there ain't many Ingrams left, so far as I know. I wanted sisters—and I've got 'em—thanks to this house. That's all the harm I've done

so far, ma'am—upon my word of honour. Sisters! That's it."

Sisters! Capacious word! Mrs. Percival was deeply moved. She wept—and she kissed Nevile Ingram. There remained for him—at his own express desire—a short interview with Mr. Percival.

Here he took the line of least resistance, as indicated by the merchant.

"Look here, Ingram," Mr. Percival had said, inspecting the ash of his cigar. "My wife runs the house, as I daresay you've noticed. And very well she does it. It's not my department at all, and I don't interfere. You've made her see your position, I understand?"

"Quite, I hope," said Ingram.

Mr. Percival smoked on thoughtfully. "All right, my boy," he said presently. "I've every confidence in her judgment. That's of course." And then he rose and stood before the fireplace. "But listen to me for one moment. Sancie is away just now, as perhaps you know."

Ingram nodded. He knew it perfectly well.

"She returns within a day or two—God bless her!—and she's got to know about this. Mind you that! She's got to be told it—somehow. And it must be done in a way that don't frighten the child. If she thinks there are ideas in our heads, she'll get 'em in hers. And that will work the mischief."

Simple Mr. Percival had by this last speech of his put himself completely into Ingram's hands.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I don't quite follow

you. What idea you may have in *your* head I'm not able to determine; but I can assure you that I have none in mine. Nor do I quite see what ideas you assume to be there.

Mr. Percival turned to flick his ash into the grate. "Oh, quite so, quite so," he said with some haste. "Naturally—none. I thought I'd just caution you."

"And you were perfectly right," said Ingram, "if you had any caution to give me. I only wish to explain that I am entirely unaware what sort of ideas you are afraid of." After that Mr. Percival found himself making much of Nevile Ingram—smoothing him down, and all that sort of thing.

Mrs. Percival's staunchness to the Idea may be commended. In its way it is rather fine. She was, perhaps, a poet in this, that, to her, ideas stood for things. But she got at them, or rather enclosed them in a circle, the beginning and end of which was exaltation. The notion that her daughters were to be trusted was an uplifting one. Being exalted, she said that she could trust them, and she did. Trusting them, she found herself exalted. Now to Ingram, desires stood for reasons, just as to the lady they stood for the fact. He wanted Sanchia more than he had ever wanted anything—or believed that he did: therefore he must have Sanchia. He wanted her because her society and nearness made him feel an honest man. Now it was reasonable that a man should want to feel honest; therefore to

want Sanchia was reasonable. That was how he worked it out. It never occurred to him to consider whether it was reasonable from Sanchia's side that she should be wanted by a married man, or be brought into a state where she should want one. Such things never do occur to the Nevile Ingrams of this world; but I think he would have raised his eyebrows if you had put it to him; and probably he might have said, "I suppose she don't want a fellow to go to the devil." This reminds one of the protest of the spendthrift duke who was advised to make a beginning of retrenchment by putting down his pastry-cook. He also raised his eyebrows, and said it was rather hard if a man couldn't have a biscuit with his glass of sherry.

CHAPTER XVIII

INGRAM URGES A "MODUS VIVENDI"

SANCHIA came back to town, with her letter in her bosom—her letter of appointment and promise. So much tenderness she felt to be due to its occasion, if not to its writer. That little scene at the dance in Chesterfield Gardens had been like a sudden finger laid upon her heart. It had revealed to her a sensitive point, it had produced an ache. Before that, she now realised, there must have been inflammation. And with her cherishing hand upon the wounded part she had explored the symptoms and the area of that sweet disease—ever since it had been shown to be a disease.

The household had shown her that. Vicky's alternating fits of mysterious reticence and elaborate protection; her "my poor darling," and her *non ragioniam' di lor;* all these hard upon Ingram's flight—oh, yes, she was a stricken deer.

Stricken, she had fled to the Gorston thickets, and in her friend's society had revelled in the sympathy he would certainly have given her if she had chosen to seek it of him. She had not chosen; but she liked to know that it was there. Oddly enough, she had never loved Senhouse so much as now,

when she loved somebody else. He was a haven indeed; she felt that it would be almost worth while to suffer some grievous anguish for the comfort she would get out of this splendid friend, who knew everything without being told, and who (she knew) asked nothing better than to help her. When he had asked her for a promise—to send for him at need—there had been no occasion whatever to hesitate. She had hesitated because it was joy to her to play with the doubt—which was no doubt—should she or should she not? And then she had kissed him very simply, because she knew that it would make him happy, and to reward him for having been teased. Yes, he was a possession; she felt the riches of him, safely funded in her heart.

But Ingram, Nevile Ingram — ah, that was a different thing! Analysing herself as she travelled homeward, alone in a railway carriage full of people, she found that Nevile Ingram, like a rising tide, had slowly lipped his way up and upwards in her heart; and then, when her heart was brimming with him, with a level onrush he had flowed into all the creeks and channels of her being, until now she seemed filled with him—filled to her finger- and toe-tips. She needed not to picture him—level-eyed, bronzed, alert, and sharp-chinned; the mere feel of him permeating her was almost intolerable pride. Without visualising, she could know what his eyes demanded of her; without recalling it, she could tell what his nearness meant, and why she had thrilled at the brush of his hand

in the pages of the dictionary, or the strength of his arm when, leaning over the book, her bosom touched it. She brooded tenderly over his plain, unvoiced desire. He loved her, he needed her; she had found favour; she knew it because he had not looked at her that night, but had spoken hardly, and had left her sitting there alone. Analysing, she felt the difference between Senhouse and Ingram. One was a beacon into port; the other dazzled her and made her faint.

She put it this way, loving to be exact. Suppose she went with mamma to an evening party. They go upstairs, shake hands, pass into the room. There will be a sprinkling of people—women on settees, men stooping over them, talking; perhaps a tall woman by the window, and two men talking to her. The eye sweeps all this up, and presently lights upon Senhouse, standing near the fireplace, hands in pockets, eyes piercing the opposite wall, vehemently declaiming some wild doctrine or another which might make you laugh if it didn't make you want to cry. Well, her heart would rise at the sight; she would say to herself, "Hurrah! Jack's here." And she would watch him with delight, quietly enjoying him, and wait her turn, well knowing he would come directly to her the moment he saw her. And if anybody else were introduced to her, or obtruded himself, it would be a bore because it might keep Jack Senhouse away. But if Ingram, Nevile Ingram, were there, she would know it before she got upstairs. She would never look for him about the

room; she wouldn't be able to see properly any one in it. She would stand still and stupid, and feel her heart beating, and be quite vague in her answers, and in a stare. And then she would feel him coming, and wait—and it would hurt, yes, hurt her, that suspense, and yet be delicious. That was the difference, exactly, between them.

And now there was to be a meeting for explanation; and she neither knew nor cared what the explanation was to be. Her only feeling was one of high excitement. Her heart jumped whenever she phrased it. A meeting for explanation. In twenty-four hours, in sixteen, in twelve—who knew? he would come deliberately to explain himself. Nor when she was at home again, and mamma, with unusual demonstrativeness, had met her in the hall, enfolded her, and proclaimed her strangely her darling; nor when her father had been—with equal strangeness—constrained and fidgety in her society; nor even when Vicky, having taken her upstairs, shut the door, locked it, sat on the bed, folded her arms and said with a snapping close, "Well, he's married"—not even then had she felt the least bit dismayed. He was coming to explain—in twenty-four hours, in sixteen, twelve, at any minute. She phrased it and her heart jumped like a trout.

But Vicky was astonished. "Who's married?" Sancie had asked.

"Who, my dear! Why, your Nevile Ingram, of course."

It is perfectly true that this news surprised without shocking her. Her affair lay in the realm of pure idyll. She saw no connection between love and marriage.

"Is he?" she asked. "He never told me. When was it?"

Vicky was slightly damped. "Oh, ages ago, of course. Years ago."

Sanchia moved about the room, finding her things. "I expect he forgot to tell me. Do you like her? What's she like?" Vicky drooped.

"I haven't the least idea. Of course she's not about. She lives in Sicily and is a bad lot."

You could never get a rise out of Sancie; one might have known that before. She said now, half turning from the glass so that you saw one open eye and arched eyebrow within the crook of her arm, "Is she? How sickening for Mr. Ingram." It was no use saying any more—but she said a little.

"Mamma says we ought to be kind to him because he's unhappy. She talks about being sisters. I hope you like the prospect."

"I do rather," Sancie said, hair-pins in her mouth. Then Vicky owned herself beaten, and was silent.

The explanation had to be waited for. Ingram did not come to Great Cumberland Place for two or three days, and when he did come it was at tea-time when there were quite a number of people there. He only stayed half an hour, and talked chiefly to Mrs. Percival about the Fitz-Urses, whom he knew,

it appeared, well. They were very recent acquaintances of Mrs. Percival's; she found them charming. Lady Fitz-Urse was, she thought, a strikingly elegant woman. Ingram allowed her a good dressmaker.

He was, however, quite at his ease, and drew Sanchia into the conversation in the most natural way in the world. He chaffed her about Dante or some one of the sort, and included himself in the mockery. "Since you've been away, you know, I've not opened him once. Oh yes, beg pardon! I have. I got him down to look up something or other—I forget what—and found this document." He produced a slip of paper, opened and read it. "'Don't forget: second person singular ends in *i* —always; second person plural in *e*—always. S.J.P.' Do you remember that?" he asked her. She glowed and smiled. Of course she remembered it.

"You see the force of fellowship and strife," he went on drily—entirely for Mrs. Percival's education—"Unless you're there to be scored off I don't read poetry. Therefore my immortal part suffers anyhow. If you're reading with me the Enemy inspires me to emulation; if you're not there I get no poetry. So I'm doomed to go wrong anyhow. That's hard lines, isn't it?"

"Very sad," said Mrs. Percival, conscious that all this was pleasant. "But I think Poetry will, in time, influence you for good."

"One hopes so, of course, and one perseveres,"

said Ingram; "but Pegasus is a wayward mount. Now, Turniptop, my new pony, is a daisy. Knows the game better than I do. How would it be, by the way, if you came and were introduced to him to-morrow?"

Mrs. Percival said she should be charmed. He turned to Sanchia. "D'you care to come too? I'm bossing the Go-Betweens to-morrow. We play the Gunners. It's rather a great occasion in its little way." He always deprecated his deeds when they were beyond cavil good. He was famous at polo.

Mrs. Percival promised for Sanchia, and took her. It was a fine afternoon.

There was no doubt at all about Ingram on horseback; he rode like a centaur. Inspired by the dæmon of the strife, there was a fierce decisiveness about the young man which made him seem really great. He saw everything, shouted his commands, and was obeyed by his wheeling field; before his stooping on-rush Gunners swerved and missed. Twice he ran clean through the field, irresistible, like an Angel of battle, like a Walkyr. Sanchia sat at gaze with swelling heart. Glory of battle! Glory of conquest! At this moment the eloquence of Senhouse, though clearly breathed through him by God, had availed him little.

Flushed, triumphant, masterful yet easy, he had stood before her a moment in his long overcoat, the sweat and dust of conflict still shining on his face. "Good game, eh? Good as Dante in its way. Glad you liked it. Eh? Oh, no, I'm no better

than the rest. Had more luck—and a wonderful mount." That was all he had for her at the moment. But he returned anon, new-groomed, curled, and anointed, bringing a friend with him, a Colonel Wybrow, whom he presented to Mrs. Percival; then said lightly to Sanchia, "Come and be introduced to Turniptop." She understood that her time was at hand.

He led her to the trees without a word, threw a coat on the grass, and said, "Let's sit and have it out." She sat, obedient, and he, very deliberately by her, pulled his trousers free at his knees, tilted his hat back, clasped his hands across his shins, looked at her narrowly, and began.

"Do you know why I bolted that night at the Chevenixes'?"

She told him simply that she did not.

"Then I'll tell you in so many words," he said. "I left you because I was getting too fond of you, and I knew it wouldn't do."

There was nothing to say. He continued querulously.

"When I came of age, the very first thing I did should have been the last thing. I fell in love with a pretty girl, and married her in a month. Claire Pierpoint she was—and I can't say anything about her except this: she left me, of her own accord, on my twenty-second birthday, and I've never seen her since. The less said the better: I'll leave it at that. . . . Now, of course, there were things I could have done. I could have got a divorce all right:

no trouble about that. But I didn't—and I shan't. I owe her nothing that I can see, nothing at all—and yet, you know, I owe myself something. Because I made a dire fool of myself nine years ago, or whatever it was, I couldn't mend matters by making an exhibition of myself before all London—and I certainly can't do it now. It's too late, to begin with, and— Anyhow, the less said about such things the better—I'm sure you agree. Very well. . . ."

She listened stilly so far, her eyes ranging the dotted field; but now, at his "very well," she turned her looks to his face, and waited for what was to come. There was no disguise about her; she was very serious. Nor did she turn her eyes from him while he told her the truth.

"I thought—when I'd got over the first shock of the thing—that I could get along all right by myself. Mind you, I'd been mad about her—you can see that. One doesn't romp into marriage in a month unless one is pretty far gone. But that year had been enough for me, I can assure you. Ghastly! Oh, ghastly! I told myself that I had learned my lesson, and could get more solid comfort out of the world before me than out of any wedded joys, as I had found them. So I went gaily off on my travels—and had eight years of it. Then I came back, and saw you."

Even then she didn't waver. She still absorbed him—his tanned face, his blue eyes, narrowed down intensely, his moustache, curled back to show his lip, his sharply-angled chin.

"You opened my eyes to a world that all my travels hadn't shown me. You gave me glimpses of a life I'd never heard of before. Hopes! I began to have hopes—even of myself. Sordid, spotted, powder-grimed, blood-spattered rascal that I was, I had gleams of myself—clean, sweetened, charitable-minded—oh, I can't explain it all. It was like straying into a Cathedral in the dusk, and seeing the candles ahead of you, and hearing a boy sing, 'Oh, for the wings of a dove.' . . . What do these things mean to a chap like me? You can't tell—and I can't tell you. You've got to live as I've lived before you can guess; and you'll never do that, Sancie, if you live to be a thousand. . . . Now, do you wonder if I came to Great Cumberland Place—and came again—and again—and as often as you'd have me? I can see that you don't wonder—nor would anybody—not even that ass, Bill Chevenix, who seems to think that because a man is married he can't have the society of good women. At that rate a good many of us will have to go to the devil, it seems to me."

He took his eyes from hers, and stuck his face between his hands. There was a pulsing, vibrating silence, until Sanchia's hand touched one of his, and he looked at her again and saw what he saw.

He groaned and turned away. "Oh, Sancie, Sancie, don't—for God's sake!"

Presently he resumed, having conquered himself. "I left you that night because I had begun to feel that I couldn't do without you. I don't

know how I got through the first day or two—I don't, upon my soul; but I've done it, thank the Lord, and now I'm all right again. That being so, I've got a proposition to make to you. I suppose you know that I respect you above all people dead or alive—that I wouldn't hurt a hair of your head. That you must know. So I'm going to ask you not to send me to the devil. Don't do that."

He looked up at her and saw her face fixed, her eyes dewy, a smile on her lips of pity for his foolishness. That he should need to ask her to be generous! At that moment there was nothing she could have refused him. He nodded and smiled his understanding, touched, but did not take, to keep, the hand she held out to him. He laid his upon it for a moment, then resumed his clasp of his shins. "I've had it out with your people. I said to 'em, 'Let me come and go like any other chap about the house. Make a friend of me if I'm worth it—let me make friends of you, anyhow.' They were awfully good about it. I like your old governor: a good sort. There's to be no humbug, you know. Just companionship, a dinner now and again, or this sort of beanfeast, or a cup of tea, or a theatre or so. That will keep my head above water—just. And now I'm going to ask the same thing of you. Don't cast me off either. Don't think, because you know what's the matter with me, that I'm going to be a blackguard. Don't think, because I'm married, that poetry's no good to the likes of me. I tell you, it's all the world. I tell you I shall grow to be a

man—and have a mind one of these days—a mind! I don't say I shall ever be like your friend the Gentleman-Gipsy—no, no. I'm no artist, and I still go on shooting birds and hunting foxes. You see, I was brought up to it. But I'm growing, I feel I'm growing; and if you'll make a bargain, Sancie, there's my hand on it."

He was ready for it now. She gave him her hand for this serious moment. She was inspired, her heart like to burst. Very creditably, he broke off into nonsense.

"That's all right! By Gad, what a lot I've talked. Who'd have thought the young man had so much blood in him? Shakespeare! I say, may I smoke a cigar? It'll cool me down, you know. Have you had tea? You haven't! What a brute I've been. Oh, don't tell me you don't want any tea. A woman would want tea on the Day of Judgment. I know as much of your sex as that, though I'm by no means a learned Johnny. Come on—let's go and forage for tea." She fell into his humour; and, thinking of it afterwards, she believed that she loved him more for this wild chatter than for all his seriousness. She could see the effort behind it, and respect it.

Thus did Mr. Ingram for himself, greatly. He had counted, not in vain, upon the loyalty of women, and had reckoned that not Mrs. Percival alone would be loyal to the Idea. It shall be recorded to his credit that he, too, was mainly loyal to it. He was

studiously off-hand, cool and guarded. If he made himself out to be blacker than he was, one can hardly blame him. That was so plainly his line of country. Sanchia was so plainly to be his guardian angel.

She took her duties seriously, dedicated herself to them in her prayers. Divine pity took the place of divine wonder. If she loved him now she didn't know it, and would have died sooner than admit it to herself.

Atop of all this she received a letter from Senhouse, to which I devote a chapter. It clinched her matter.

CHAPTER XIX

SENHOUSE FROM MOSEDALE. THE WOMAN'S ART

My friend's letters to his Beloved, all of which are before me, alter unmistakably from the date of the Gorston visit—the second Gorston visit. The change is subtle, but it is there. They are no less ardent, explore no less the circumjacent universe; but they seem not so confident, they have the air of one who talks aloud in the dark to provide himself with assurance of a human note. It is not that he loves her now, or that he is telling her so now: that must have been obvious to her from the beginning. Nor is it, on the other hand, that she loves him now. Far from that, unhappy one, he knows pretty certainly that she does not. He never assumes it, nor seems concerned whether she does or doesn't. It is, rather, that she knows of his love for her, and he of her knowledge of it. He exults in his naked soul, dallies with the fact of confession, revels in the wild prospects thrown open to him by that, and (as will be seen) is tempted further, and (for a moment) yields. He recovers himself almost at once, and by a fine effort takes over the command again. But I anticipate, in saying so much, what I have now to cite. The following letter is dated "Mosedale, 5th June," and is the first he wrote her, or at any rate posted

to her, after his Gorston farewell. Mosedale is the "green valley in Wastdale," which was one of his chosen camping-grounds. He had a wild garden there upon the shoulders of the mountains, by which it is kept inviolate:—

MOSEDALE, *5th June.*

The land laughs, but not so loud as I—nor so long. All about Black Sail the white mist-wreaths stream and fly; but not so fast, driven by the west wind, as my thoughts, which my heart-beats urge. Mosedale Beck is in foaming fettle, and some *Primula japonica*, which I sowed there last year, are a cloud of crimson, coral, and salmon-pink, floating (as meseemeth) over a bed of lettuce-green. There's a palette! The sun strikes all this blaze of colour, and you think of Van Eyck's "Adoration of the Lamb"—or you would if you were here. And you *are* here, my Blessed One, as you are everywhere with me. A pillar of fire by night, of white cloud by day, in the glow of the fire, in the gleam of the cloud I see your holy face; and as the brook murmurs its content with things as they are I hear your low clear tones call me by my names of friend, brother—ah, no more of that! Let me remember how good it is to be alive on such a golden morning.

> Now bloom white violets, now daffodils,
> And on the windy uplands lilies blow;
> Now breaks to flower my Flower, and fulfils
> Valley and hillside with her rosy glow.
> Meadows, in vain you laugh your idle grace!
> What have ye that she hath not in her face?

A long way after Meleager; but he never sang his ἤδη λευκόϊον θάλλει more stoutly than I my jingle.

Why do lovers howl and rend their garments when they are parted? There's that same Meleager, almost in the same breath, wailing ἅρπασται! "She's been taken from me," he raves; "what beast could be so cruel?" All because poor dear Heliodora went back to town, to be taken out to parties by her mamma, to have gilded youths about her in Hyde Park, and quite a swarm of them buzzing over her dance-card, and scribbling their initials all over it, with little white pencils held most uncomfortably in little white kids. You see, I know all about it, and ain't jealous. No, no; I leave that to the God of Moses and other uneasy despots—potentates who have such a high opinion of themselves that they are forced to have low ones of their ladies. I protest, by the light I have, that it isn't at all necessary for me to see you, though extremely so that I should love you, and have what I have. Why, what should I do with you that I have not done better already! Watch you, touch your hand in a crowd, edge up with Apollo and brisk Mr. Dartrey to take you out a-dancing? No, by Hercules, but I do better with you here. I see you, feel your nearness, know you thrilling in the dusk. "Thou and I, sphered in solitude"—thou and I! And that's better than to spy after you in the Park; and as for dancing—why, you are dancing with the daffodils here in Mosedale, and I play the tune on my pipe, like Daphnis or some other son of Pan. Let Apollo caper in

Grosvenor Square and steer you in and out of the throng; your soul, my soul, is here with me, treading the Galaxy in a dance to no mortal music. How am I to condescend to trivial intercourse with you who have given me of your heart's communion? Never, never, never. You and I have done imperishably. I surrender to your Dartreys and Polschkins your temporary dwelling-place, much too good for them though it be.[1]

That's the kind of lover you have, Queen Mab, for so you have made him. He is very well content that you should let your light shine on herded London; though the light shine in darkness and the darkness comprehend it not. Here and there will be one who will be able to walk in your beam. Dia Artemis, I praise the gods of the country for what I have of you.

I am very well content, I say, to plod my country ways and know you wielding your spells in town. A great power is in your thin sweet hands, my sweet; you are in the way of being a great artist. If I take a professional view of your life and conversation you mustn't blame me; for, botcher though I may be, I'm an artist myself, or no lover. And perhaps you remember how we talked about Art in the park, under the golden oaks, and how you repined at having to give up your hopes of a studio;

[1]This should have caused Sanchia a pang—this belated utterance. Poor M. Polschkin had been dismissed to his piano, and forgotten long ago. And who is Mr. Dartrey? I know nothing about him.

and how I told you that painting wasn't the woman's art, nor sculpture neither, nor poetry neither. Do you?

Well, I stick to that. Rosa Bonheur wore trousers, but couldn't paint any the better. Good soul, she was no Rubens. George Eliot played the Tenth Muse in St. John's Wood Road, or somewhere of the sort, and had a humour of her own for which she had to pay—as none knew better than she. Aurora Leigh wrote verses, and her great old burning lover smothered her with incense, but didn't make a poet of her for all that. He simply proved what an artist she was in her own art—which no man can touch. There's man's art, you know, and woman's art; and though I love every stroke of your brush, and know how sensitive it is, and how patient, yet I see you an immortal artist without any brushes at all, in a stuff more subtle than paint, more shining than Pheidias's ivory and gold; and I see the crowd before your masterpiece hushed and still. Some of them cover their eyes and others say their prayers, and others laugh for mere joy of great work. What do you say to that, little artist? Isn't that an art worth your pains?

It's an art so difficult, to be worked at under conditions so confusing, that it's only one woman in a thousand can succeed in it. Charm, as with all arts, is at the bottom of it; I fear it must be owned, too, that persuasion is an essential. But, like every great form of Art, yours is didactic. It teaches involuntarily virtue, temperance and holi-

ness. Men and women come and behold it, and go their ways the better for having seen it, the richer for the experience, and the cleaner for purged emotions; or, it may be, fired by its excellence to a generous rivalry, themselves to work for such high ends. What can be better? If you can so work upon your own delicate surface as to mould it close to your noble soul, and impress it with your own quality; if in the gallery of the world you can unveil yourself for a thousand pair of eyes to see, and praise God for the grace to see—why, what an artist you are, and what an audience you have! No painter since this world began to spin had such a one, no musician, no church-builder. Christopher Wren, you may think, had a greater, thronging his great dome on the hill; but I tell you no. For you, as you go your ways about the city, will every day pass more people than Paul's would hold, and need not pass one but will go on his road, unknowingly, the better for the moment's nearness to you. Like a whiff of thyme on a grassy down, like the breath of violets from a bank, or of bean-flowers blown across a dusty hedge, some gentle exhalation of your soul sighed through your body will hint to the passion-driven wretch things innocent and quiet. The blue beam of your steadfast eyes may turn his own to heaven; a chance-caught, low, sweet tone of your voice may check clamour; an answer turn his wrath; the mere hang of your clothes, so nearly will they express your nature, may send him on his way hopeful and renewed. You can't know—it's none of

your affair—how or to what end your art will tell. All your business as artist is to work perfectly, to have the vision and to get it down.

And what a material to work with—fine, moving, breathing. quick-fluttering flesh! Infinitely more elastic than painter's stuff; warm, tinged with life, instinct with it; rhythmic, eloquent. You can be picture, form, poem, symphony in one. You address the mind through every sense. Every gesture is charged, every throb can express, every word be a phrase, every look a tone! Think of it, Sanchia, before you turn away. Think well whether upon that exquisite medium you cannot impress your best.

As I write, I fire from within, and see a vision of a Woman to whom a whole world might bow down. It's not for most women; I think it's for very few; but there's no doubt about its possibility. It's no harder for a woman to make herself a work of supreme art than for a man to paint a "Las Meniñas" or write a *Père Goriot*. But she must have a genius for self-expression—and you have it.

The Ideal, since men first looked up to the heights, has always been in the shape of a woman. Sex has much to do with that, I don't doubt, for man has been the maker, and has always dreamed of what he can never be. Athene of the men of Attica, Artemis of the Arcadians, Mary of the Christians —it has always been so. The holiest thing of all, the most mysterious, inaccessible, has worn the

bounty of a beautiful woman, and God has spoken through her eyes. Grey-blue eyes, ringed with dark, for me. A slim and pliant form. A face of pure oval faintly tinged with rose. A round and firm chin, where character strikes sharply yet gently. Pale lips drooping at the corners ever so little—for sympathy, you know. That proud Greek bow is too remote from our labour and sorrow. Broad brows speaking candour and charity to the wise and the wayward alike. An ardent mind, eager for light; a habit so strong to purpose and action that chastity is involved; and withal a glowing heart which love will one day blow into a flame, and thus fulfil the woman from the maid.[1] Some day, Sanchia, some day the woman will be fulfilled and the work done. Then, like a priest who has conversed with mystery and been face to face with the holiest, I shall stand up before the people on their knees. *Ite, missa est*, I shall say—and bid the boy blow out the altar candles.

A vision of life indeed rises up, and lifts me after it. The shifts I am at to make my own little world a simple, cleanly, wholesome place drop suddenly off me like superfluous clothes. One is only driven to wear them, mark you well, as screens against the mire and bad smells of modern ways. Where the treasure is there will the heart be also. Nothing need vex him who has the treasure in his heart. Life turns inwards, and keeps out the cold—as

[1] All that forms a portrait, happy and exact, of Sanchia Percival as she was in 1894.

gipsies turn their backs to the weather and spread their hands to the crackling logs.

Mine is a lonely way, you know, and often I am forced to bawl my song, "The jolly life I lead," for fear I should hear the undercurrent of misgiving, and listen for nothing else. So, like Figaro, I make haste to laugh, and thus continue to delude myself till, by and by, the mood passes, and I can look up at the stars or the open sky, and know that I am in tune with them. That's a great business of ours, I assure you, to make a harmony. Listen to the music of the spheres, and screw up to the pitch they keep. There's our art for the conversion of the world. For we all aim at that—no less; and I with the rest. You know my gospel and won't take it amiss for being somewhat musty. Poverty, poverty, poverty! That's the cry, if you would be rich, O son of man. But now, when I crave the treasure of your golden heart, my saint, and sigh sometimes that I may have to go without it, ain't I the very inconsistent poor devil I complain of my next-door neighbour for being? Of course I am. Yet—oh, for the deep draught of your eyes I lately had! Oh, to read the great trust in your long gaze! Oh, for the assurance of your thrilled voice, and oh, for the touch of your lips on my forehead!

I'm a recreant, I see. Farewell, Sanchia.

To say that she was moved by this perfervid letter is to say little. She was inspired by it. Its effect—the effect of its passionate flattery—was to

lift her nobly to an eminence—as it were some bold promontory in a clearer air—whence, with a heart full of pity, she could behold the infirm purposes of men; their infirm purposes and ignorant, ignoble strivings. As she stood there, folding close her wings, for fear she might soar out of range, she pondered mankind, infinitely compassionate. Some such effect upon her her friend's letters always produced, some such lifting, inspiring effect; but now, when her heart was hardly her own, the exaltation was shared; trailing in the wake of her beating wings came Ingram, the bruised, the world-begrimed Ingram: and she loved him! and he loved her! And she could exercise upon him her "Woman's Art."

Was it, then, her work in the world to be lustral water, to pour herself out, that he might wash and be made whole? Was she to be an Influence? Could she act so upon that self-accusing, dumbly-struggling, tortured young hero of Hurlingham? Here she sought in her bosom for her letter, and read and re-read some passages:—

"*Like a whiff of thyme on a grassy down, like the breath of violets from a bank, . . . some gentle exhalation of your soul sighed through your body will hint to the passion-driven wretch things innocent and quiet.*"

If this were true—or half true—could there be any question whether she should save Nevile Ingram's soul alive?

"*The blue beam of your steadfast eyes may turn his own to heaven; a chance-caught, low, sweet tone*

of your voice may check clamour; an answer turn his wrath; the mere hang of your clothes, so nearly will they express your nature, may send him on his way hopeful and renewed."

Hopeful and renewed! Was this her work in the world? Could this be true, or even half true? And did it make any difference, or vitiate her argument, that she trembled with the hope that it might be true?

She had to ponder these things within herself. No one could help her—save one. And he was in Mosedale.

The irony of the situation in his regard will not be lost upon the reader. Senhouse himself, a keen humourist, had he known that his adoring praises were to be turned to the service of another man, could not have forborne a smile. It would have been awry; but he would have realised the shrewdness of the hit. Indeed, he did, since it was his destiny to have it aimed. In her perplexity she wrote to him.

She said very little; but he was accustomed to read between the lines of her stiff and wary letters. He used to say that he read her, not by the words, but by the throbbing of the lines. They wavered, he said, flushed and paled like summer lightning as he watched them. She wrote, "Your letter makes me very proud, though it puzzles me too. I try to believe what you tell me, but of course I know that you are not a fair judge! It's very difficult sometimes to know what one ought to do, supposing one

has any power of acting on other people. I wish very much that I could talk to you of my affairs. They get in such a tangle sometimes. I see what you mean about the Woman's Art, and quite believe that there may be such women. But when you tell me that I can learn it, it makes me rather nervous. It's a great responsibility. I want very much to do right. You have given me great ideals, and I work for them. But I'm rather disheartened just now. When shall you be within reach of me? Your perplexed Sanchia."

To this he immediately replied: "I am coming at once. In two days I shall see your eyes—and then, if you please, never again."

CHAPTER XX

THE PLAY QUICKENS AND RUNS UP TO A POINT

The writer of that letter, Senhouse my friend, scared out of his philosophy, made forced marches from Wastdale to London, arriving there in mid-June, the season at its height. Vicky Percival, in gauzy draperies which showed her shining as the moon in a cloud fleece, flitted (chiefly in hansoms and seldom alone) from party to party. Hawise, Lady Pinwell, gave dinners to Conservative statesmen and their wives; Philippa, Mrs. Tompsett-King, had the Bishop of Seringapatam and Mrs. Luff staying with her for a Congress. Melusine and her mother were much occupied with trousseau matters; and Mr. Gerald Scales stood outside many a shop-door and smoked cigars. He was a stoutly built, black-browed and rubicund young man, always well dressed—though his taste in clothes was never mine. Mrs. Percival thought him vivid, and would have you mark his strength of character. Melusine (to her diary) called him Tristan: to his friends he was Tubby—Tubby Scales. What sort of appearance the lean figure, clad in white sweater and grey flannel trousers, the swarthy, darkly-smiling face and eyes of gipsy black of my even more

salient friend may have made to these people—say, in Bond Street of a fine afternoon—one can but guess. Bill Chevenix, who chanced upon him once, reported him to Vicky, all unknowing, as "an astonishing sportsman," and supposed that he advertised some rest-cure or crystal-gazer. This makes one fancy that he had not yet—in those still early, vehement years of his life—learned to accommodate himself to the customs of society. Later on, he certainly did, for I met him frequently in London in 1900–1–2 and saw nothing outlandish in his appearance. He had a dress-coat (of the oldest, it's true) at that time, and might have sat among his peers at the opera without remark, though I believe he never did. He used to say that you could only hear music properly alone or with musicians. Very naturally, then, he chose for the gallery. But these are trifles: certainly he would have been more entertaining to Bill Chevenix than entertained by Bill. The point is that there he was, and in no happy frame of mind, getting such glimpses of his adorable Sanchia as Mr. Ingram could spare him.

Now Mr. Ingram, at this hour, was deeply and undisguisedly enamoured. He was frequently at the point of not caring who knew it, and only pulled up, I do believe, by the undoubted fact that when Vicky showed that she knew it he cared very much indeed. It was in Vicky's power to strike him with chills; she had a level way of looking at him, superbly disdainful—as a Goddess from her chariot may have regarded some doomed, abandoned wretch

in a tragedy—which honestly made the young man ashamed of himself. He used to stalk back to Jermyn Street after such an encounter muttering to himself and saying, By George he must pull up a bit. And so he did for a dozen hours—at the end of which the call would prove too strong for him, and he would make vehement suit to Sanchia with eyes and voice, and silence (which was the fiercest way of all). He was nearly always with her: when she walked alone in the mornings, she was not alone; in the afternoons, at a party, he would join her; he read with her, evenings, and danced with her o'nights. Now what hours of what days were left for the voluntary outcast in sweater and grey flannels revisiting the glimpses of his moon?

Sanchia, dumb before the world, very pale, grave-eyed and careworn at this time,—careworn, poor child, at a time when she had been better without a thought,—did find some means to be kind to both her lovers. To Senhouse she could never be anything but loyal—if loyalty were any good to him. The moment she knew of his coming she went to see him in Grosvenor Gardens; she gave him the whole of that morning, but refused to stay to luncheon. Excusing herself by alleging a press of engagements, she was swept away in a cab, and as she fleeted up Park Lane you might have seen in her wide eyes a light such as Senhouse had never yet been able to put there. Yet she saw him again the next day for an hour or so, and was able to make, presently, a definite engagement for a

visit to Kew, and tea on the grass, under the trees there.

On such glimpses, on such shadowy promises he throve as best he might, and kept his love alive. He must have realised that his case was hopeless —even if he had not done that before, when, at Gorston, she called him her friend, or brother, and had kissed his forehead. But I think that, dragging his theories violently into the light, affirming them loudly in his need and swearing that they held water, he now told himself that, had other things been equal (as God knew they were not), she could never give herself to him—nor he ask it of her. If there was any single condition of the affairs of this world upon which he had not a very reasoned theory, I should be glad to know it. Certainly marriage was not that one. His theory of marriage, freely declaimed, was that it was a wicked and detestable institution by which women could still be put into slavery and degradation. He thought that to make a woman the property of a man was to insult her more deeply than you injured her; it would have been inconceivable to him that a man who loved, who dared to love, Sanchia should have considered the marrying of her. "Read Leviticus," he used to thunder at the dazed and well-dined Roger Charnock; "read Leviticus, read Deuteronomy, you old stock-keeper, if you would understand the marriage-service! Read the Psalms of David. 'Happy is the man that hath his quiverful'; that's the use of the woman to him, that's the lodestone of his heart

—not her eyes, man, but her womb. And you tell me that Dante, who saw all Hell and Heaven ranked in Her honour, would better have yoked her with a ring and made a drudge of her noble limbs, and let her starry eyes grow dim in the service of his bed and board? And why? That he might not be ashamed before his enemies in the gate! Oh, lord of the earth, what sacrifice is too great for thy proper pride? No, no. If you would make women free indeed, he used to tell Charnock, with monitory forefinger, you must cut the marriage-service out of your prayer-book. They may then meet men on equal terms; and the rest you may leave to them. The life of a woman loveworthy should be one long courtship, he vowed. No man is fit to touch a woman's hem, in truth; what she gives him let him think himself lucky to get; but at least, at the very least, let him have the decency to own up to his fortune—not swell from the wedding-day, and strut out of church, a stock-keeper, a funded man; and thenceforward go his lordly way, with a considering eye for this trim shape and that rosy cheek, and a galliard leap of the heart at the thought—"My wife (lately a star) is now at home, busy about my hearth. I have dined—and well; let me now take the case of this pretty child, who (God pity her) sees me a fine figure of a man. Hum, sweeting, shall we take a turn?" And then he would rise his lean length and hold shocked Charnock with his piercing eyes, and say, "God of Life and Love, Roger, do you ask me to put myself in that stallion's shoes?" And

Charnock would stiffly reply, "I ought not to listen to you, Jack. That's all I have to say."

This extravagant philosophy he now summoned in his need—which was very sore. He told himself times and again, not only she did not love him, not only did she probably love somebody else, but that he loved her out of hope and measure and could therefore never have her. And by dint of hammering the paradox into his head, day in, day out, he came to accept it as a law of being, and was charming to her. He slew his innermost self, he stifled love and adopted friendship in his stead. He was with her in Charnock's drawing-room, in picture-galleries, in garden and park, whenever she would have him there, and not by one glimmer of a hint did he let her know what he had done in her honour. He was, to all appearance, the man he had been when she knew him first, eloquent, profuse, absurd, rhapsodising on this and that—poetry, politics, life and death, the here and the hereafter. He made her laugh, he made her tearful; he made her think, he made her hope. He fortified her pride, inspired her to courage; in a word, he gave her back herself into her own hands again. She read herself in his eyes; and though she was too reasonable to believe all that she saw there, she was not proof against something of the flattering picture. She took it from him that she had character and parts; that she could think and ought to think. She understood that she had a brain, and that many other people had not—but only habits.

I repeat—his talk with her was hardly ever about people, nearly always about things. Men were Man to him, or Mankind; women were Woman. Falling naturally into his way, it was so also with her. Consequently Ingram rarely left her heart by way of the tongue. Once or twice he had hovered, as it were, at the gate, had been on her lips; but the moment had gone by; she had been swept forward on the rush of her friend's discourse, and the young man had retired. And yet it may well have been that she was to see him that afternoon at a party, or read poetry with him that evening, after tea, in Great Cumberland Place. Sanchia was by nature reserved, it's true, and preferred her own counsel; but Senhouse, watching her like a terrier, knew very well that she had something to tell him.

And so she had. She had realised that she was drifting, she knew not whither—save that the stream that bore her was very sweet, and the airs that wafted her warm and fragrant. Music seemed to be in them—eager, strong and hopeful, yet sometimes rising sharp and high, with a hurt note, as if some soul or another was adrift with her, adrift and voicing pain. The question still came to her—came and stared at her—Was she doing right? Right! Alas, where now stood Right and Wrong? Or where stood she, a daughter of the Church? Stood they, as once, on either side the confessional of the Rev. Father Stephen Morony? Or stood they boldly, rugged and naked, in the Open Country, in sight of Pan and the Nymphs? Here were ques-

tions she would fain have put to Senhouse, which she had not, so far, put to the Rev. Father Morony.

She was, you will have understood, the child of churchgoing parents—of a father sturdily Anglican and of a mother High Anglican. At eleven o'clock on Sunday mornings she had been trained to go with both parents to what Mr. Percival called Morning Prayer, and Mrs. Percival Mattins with Sermon. Mr. Percival prayed into his hat without kneeling; Mrs. Percival, having genuflected to the altar, signed her bosom before she commended herself. But before that silken, scented, and crowded ceremony could take place, Sanchia with her mother had been to a small, darkened and twinkling shrine and had heard the Communion Office on her knees, with clasped hands and bowed head. Once a month she received the Sacrament, once a month she confessed to the Rev. Stephen Morony such sins as had occurred to her the night before to be worthy his consideration. This June, for the first time in her remembrance, she had omitted, not the night's reflection certainly, but the next day's rehearsal to a priest. The Reverend Stephen Morony had not, this June, called her his dear child, had not given counsel or ghostly comfort. Here was a Crisis. She was full young, and she was scared. Putting it bluntly to herself, Had she refrained (ah, and had she not?) because she knew beforehand just what this priest would say to her? Had she been a coward, and shirked her duty? Had she not? There was only one escape from the certain answer, namely,

conviction (if she could by any means get it) that Father Morony would have been wrong in his judgment, and that Father Morony had no more absolution to bestow than any other temperate man of the world. But if Father Morony were but a man of the world, where were his Priest's Orders? Where, oh, where was the Apostolic Succession? Where were the Sacraments of the Church? Where was Heaven upon Earth, and where, shrouded and awful, was God? Oh, she might well complain, oh, for the saner creed of Vicky, her sister, who used to save up "sins" until they got to be what she called "a bore," and then cart them bodily to the Reverend Father Morony and shoot them into his confessional—and write that evening to the person concerned, and say that she would always be a friend, and always anxious about his welfare. No such simple remedies were for Sanchia. The moment she doubted she must probe.

To discuss these things with her ardent, reasonable friend would have been as easy as kissing—if she could have brought herself to do it. But there was always a difficulty—the difficulty a girl must feel in talking to one man of another. Even that might have been got over, had there not been another still more hopeless obstacle in sight beyond. To talk of Nevile Ingram, to own that she was in love, and loved, must needs have led her to speak about his marriage, his wife in Sicily, and her disorderly ways there. And to do this—if she could bring herself to try—would fetch her up at a point where she must imply

what she had never ventured to imply even to herself. What, pray, had a wicked wife in Sicily to do with her, Sanchia, in love in England? The ground on which she stood, ostensibly, was solid, honourable ground. Nevile was unhappy, lonely, in danger of disaster, and she kept him out of harm's way, soothed, strengthened, rejoiced him. If any motive lay behind, connected somehow with his wife in Sicily, could that be a good motive? At this point she always shut her eyes, and moved her pale lips in a sort of prayer. "I love him, I make him happy—he needs me, he loves me"—some such words, prayer by suspiration only. And after so praying she put the question aside, and heard the voices of the Sirens, and felt the steady swift sweet tide carry her forward, and the fragrance, and the hope; and so drifted on. She had Senhouse's letters, and fortified herself on those. He had told her that she made God out of all her loveliest thoughts —and made her beloved so also. He had told her that her acts and words must be holy and wholesome to all who came within her sensible distance. He had told her that the one sin was insincerity, and the great virtue poverty. He had told her that all religions were true for those who truly held them. The Reverend Stephen Morony, beaten off for the time, faded from her sight—and she drifted on. Then, on a fine Friday afternoon, walking with Ingram across the Park, she saw Senhouse striding to meet her. Here was her affair. She did not falter, though her eyes grew rigid. She said to her com-

panion, "This is my friend, Mr. Senhouse, coming. I should like you to know him."

Ingram looked sharply forward. "Oh, that's him, is it?" he said, then snapped his lips together, and straightened himself. Senhouse had seen her before she had become aware of him One could guess that by the glaze over his black eyes, and the smoulder below it.

But when he stopped before her all such symptoms of his case had disappeared.

"You!" he said. "Wonderful! London's no bigger than England after all."

Sanchia had her business before her. "I want you to know Mr. Ingram," she said—and to Ingram, "My friend Mr. Senhouse." The two men shook hands, Ingram very stiff. But it was he who said, "Very glad to meet you."

Senhouse returned his, "Thanks very much," and began at once to talk—apparently in the middle of what he had been thinking of before.

"I've been looking at the rabbits in the enclosure —bread-fed creatures, sleek and round as dormice. You'd say there wasn't a fibre of the wild beast left unswayed by the nursemaids and loungers. But there is—and I'm elated. They've got some Japanese iris in there—not nibbled down yet. It's because they're in wet ground, I discover. It was very odd."

Ingram stared straight at this creature, so much at ease, who should have been so uneasy; Sanchia's eyes shone.

"I watched one consider the case. Was it worth wet feet? He bundled himself up to the edge of the mire, and hunched himself, and thought it out. He thought with his nostrils, you know. They agitated like fans. Literally, he ventilated his ideas —decided against it, and began to feed diligently where he was, lest he should be tempted to reopen the thing. They hate wet, you know; and yet I've seen one swim. A stoat was after him." Then, as if it struck him suddenly, he flashed Ingram into the conversation. "Have you ever seen that?"

Ingram nodded sharply. "Yes, I've seen it. I shot one once in a beck."

All Senhouse said was, "I hadn't a gun." He allowed for Ingram's defiance, and rather liked him for it.

But Sanchia said, "You wouldn't have shot it if you had. You know you wouldn't." He looked at her quickly and grinned. Ingram saw that. It made him rather prickly.

Senhouse branched off on to pictures, and discoursed for a few moments about a show he had been to; then, finding that he and Sanchia were getting learned, not to say technical, he broke off. "Farewell," he said, "until to-morrow. Our engagement stands?"

She said, "Of course. Grosvenor Gardens at two." They parted without shaking hands, and she saw him swing away over the Park. She little knew what he carried with him. "God bless her! God bless her always! . . . It may be all right.

Anyhow, she's a Goddess, and can do no wrong. And—God bless her always!"

He winced at the pain, and shut his eyes hard more than once. "Courage! Face the Open, young man!" He walked far into the night, he knew not well whither. London was to see no more of him for a season.

After he had fought his beasts, he wrote to her.

CHAPTER XXI

THE TRAMP'S TESTAMENT

CHANCTONBURY RING, *A Wild Night.*

ALL the hounds of heaven and hell are loose about me to-night. The South-west has opened wide his gates, and the wind-pack is abroad. But their howling and the gnashing of their teeth cannot drown the shrill music of my heart. This is the song it sings—I have loved, I have loved—I have told her that and let her go. Now I am alone in the dark, with no companion but a dream.

She is not for me—she is too high. It were as if one wooed a goddess. No, no, I have done well to give her back her heart, to put away her thin sweet hands, to look my last into her deep eyes, to wait my last upon her sad lips. The work she has to do, alone with her heart, is as nothing to the wrong I dared to dream against her. She, Sanchia, the tramp's mate—hedgerow-comrade of his disordered goings! Madman, what were you about?

Now the dream is over. It has gone as this great storm will go. When the last tatters of the torn clouds have flown their way before the gale, I shall look out seaward to a white-rimmed sky, or over the weald of Sussex to the blue Surrey hills; see Hindhead like a broken knife-blade, and the long

ridge of Leith Hill shrouded in trees. The truce of heaven will shine on all alike; the sun, rising over Wolstonbury, will touch the spire of Cowfold, and warm the grey and russet of old Wiston into life. On me too will that peace descend, and I shall tell myself that all is well. For Sanchia lives her holy life, thou poor fool; and thou mayest love her all thy fill, and take joy in her fair going, thanking God for all that she has been to thee. Thou hast had thy vision of Artemis the Chaste. Courage, then; do thy work in the world. She is thy friend for ever—is not this honour enough?

I know well that it is.

Ask any woman you please which was the happiest time of her life, she will tell you—the year of her betrothal. Ask any man, he will tell you—his bachelor days. What do these things mean? It is worth while finding out. That which should be the perfecting of the nature of either, when the two human hemispheres, as Plato puts it, are one rounded whole again, does not in either case result in happiness. Contentment, possibly, but not happiness. Marriage, then, is not the happy state. How then?

It is not, and it cannot be, as it is now ordered; for the notion of possession, of property once more, has entered in and vitiated it. It has poisoned the nature of man and degraded the conscience of woman. Women are not, it may be, angels before marriage; it is certain that they should not be property afterwards. But since, by virtue of a legal con-

tract, they are technically so, a man is so made by tradition and proneness to possess that he will consider her so, even against his own judgment, even despite his own honour; and the moment he believes himself secure of her he will cease to serve her. Now, to love a woman, in my belief, is not only to desire her. Much more it is to be allowed to serve her. The better part of loving is the need to give, not the desire to receive. In a perfect union of hearts and bodies the rivalry is not who shall get, but who shall spend the more. There should be no end to that noble strife—nor will there be on the woman's part; nor need there be on the man's, if he is always *to be* blessed. Poisoned man is the bane of marriage, not woman. It is natural to a woman to mate, natural to a man to master. But unless we curb that brute instinct in the man there can be no real happiness for the woman.

As for me, I will never marry as the law now stands. I will not enslave any woman. To put into my hands legal instruments whereby I am secure in her so long as she is worth my while, and free of her the moment she does what it is my right, as a man, to do; so to treat the woman in whose eyes I have seen heaven, to whose heart I go for peace, is to insult me by the supposition that I can so insult her. I will never do it, Sanchia. I'll become a monk first.

What's to be done then? I have nothing heroic to suggest. If I go maimed through life, an unrounded hemisphere, I'll hobble along, my con-

science clear, at least. And perhaps "Patience and shuffle the cards" is as good a roadside saw as any other. There are signs that the accursed old system is breaking up—signs on all sides. Reasonable persons have long lifted their eyebrows, and now are beginning to lift their voices. So the time may be coming when they can lift up their hearts. It won't be yet; you and I may never see it. It was expedient once, we read, that one man should die for the people. It is doubtless necessary that there should be frequent crucifixions. It seems to be the way of the world. A man to whom the truth is blazed as clear as noon goes out into the streets filled to the lips with his revelation. Smug citizens avoid him, put up their shutters, and lock their doors; dogs bark at his heels; the ribald gather; one throws a stone. Then comes the storm upon him, in the which he falls, battered, bleeding, with glazed eyes. There's an end of the blasphemer who dares to question established order, who says that use and wont are not sacred at all, but hoary in iniquity.

Having slain him, they learn that he was a god, and his revelation a law of nature. Up goes a statue, and his words are read as gospel. That's how we get on in this quaint world, climbing to the stars on the heaped bodies of our heroes and sages. It's no use quarrelling with it. Whether I'm to trample or be trampled, teach me, Sanchia, not to complain.

If I had been less certain of what honour and conscience had to tell me, I had made you mine at

Gorston the other day—not by that kiss you gave me, but by others I should have given you. My beautiful, ardent, noble, thrilled young creature, visible incarnation of all that is clean and quick, I can thank God that you have kissed me once, and that I have done no more than receive that benediction. They say that holy Artemis bent over Endymion as he lay at Latmos. 'Tis her only stooping: she never graced Hippolytus as highly, another devotee. And Dante lived to walk the dusty ways of hell, and see the live silver of the spheres, having received the salutation of Beatrice. She bowed to him, once, in the street. He never felt chilly after that, nor complained of short rations. God knows that I shall not.

The life I lead seems to be reasonable, because it shirks nothing, concedes nothing, is useful, brings me back and keeps me close to the real Good Things. Did I ever tell you of a man I knew once, a man called Thursfield, who had what they call misfortunes? Such indeed they were. His children grew up and went into the world; his wife tired of him and went her ways also. He was left in middle life with nothing but some thousands a year and a house or two. Odd as one might think it, they didn't satisfy him. He let them all go; I believe that he endowed a charity with them—an almshouse of sorts. I found him some two years ago in a hollow of the Dorsetshire Downs, inhabiting a shepherd's wooden hut, living mostly on what he could coax

out of the unthrifty soil. He quoted George Borrow to me: "There's night and day, brother, both sweet things; there's likewise the wind on the heath!" He called these the Good Things, and said that they were good enough for him. The sun the wind, the rain: I too find them excellent. And if I want another stand-by or a stronghold to fly to, I can lift up my eyes to the everlasting hills. Black Sail will always shelter Mosedale, and in Chanctonbury Ring I can still find Pan and the Nymphs.

The storm dies down, the wet stars behold me. Over the bones of dead Briton and dead Roman the leaf-mould lies quiet, and out of them spring old Goring's beeches. Dim through the dark I can guess at the great-breasted downs, and hear afar off the tinkle of the sheep-bells. Courage comes back after a night with Pan at his fiercest; the nymphs peer up from the borstal, or through the holt; and here gleams a white shoulder, and there weave white arms. The God of Nature is a kindly soul. He likes us to have courage, and keep good hearts.

Farewell, Sanchia, too dear for my possessing; I leave you in the keeping of that benevolent one. "For He shall give His Angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." When next I write to you, or see your

face, lover or not, you shall never know it. And I'll come and pipe at your wedding when you bid me. I have what I have, and am content. Lo, the dawn is here! Farewell.

CHAPTER XXII

IN THE DRAWING-ROOM

It seems, then, that he had failed to keep tryst with her; there had been no walk in Kew Gardens; in that short interview in Hyde Park she had looked her last upon one lover, as such. His letter from Chanctonbury told her so much. Remained the other.

Ingram remained, inseparable from her side. Every look he gave her, every look he withheld, the words he said, the words he didn't say, his curt, sharp letters with neither beginning nor ending—all told her that he must be reckoned with, and confirmed the hasty and continuous whisperings of her own heart. She was so far gone in love with the young man that Senhouse's adoring and desperate cry scarce touched her at all. She was not pitiful when she learned that he had come up with a question on his lips and had not had the heart to put it; she was not even touched by the fatuity of his reasons for not putting it—as if his belief or non-belief in marriage could have swayed her! Her, so deep in love with a married man! Such gallant blindness must have filled her eyes at any time but this.

She answered him kindly, affectionately. She

wrote, "Dear friend, I hope that nothing will ever persuade me that you are not that. Some day, when I have time to think how much I owe you, I will write to you about my debt. I can never pay it, I know; but I don't think you will want me to. If you still care for the promise I made you at Gorston I shall always hold to it. One of my reasons for being sorry that you couldn't come to Kew was that I couldn't ask your advice. But perhaps I shouldn't have had the courage. . . . I am sure you rate me too highly—of course you do. It makes me nervous, and afraid of not coming up to the standard. But you told me once that one ought always to aim at things out of reach; so perhaps I shall grow by degrees. Good-bye for the moment: they are waiting for me to go out. I shall write again soon, and hope that you will. Sanchia."

In July matters swept swiftly to a climax. Love is a voracious eater: the dainties of to-day are mere food for to-morrow. By the middle of the month it had come to this, that Ingram found himself unable to be with her alone, and that she, knowing his pain, found it so sweet as to be almost irresistible. The bare presence of each was trembling-matter to the other. They would stand in assemblies, tongue-tied, preoccupied, not daring to look—a locked pair, convicted at a glance. Vicky Percival was scared out of her wits, so much so that she did foolishly. She railed, not to Sanchia, but to her mother.

Mrs. Percival, unfortunately, had taken a great

liking for Ingram. She admired all that he stood for, we know; but she esteemed the man himself for what he was. Accustomed as she had been to deference in her household and circle of acquaintance, she was now in the company of a person who never deferred to anybody, but who, rather, took her advice because it agreed with his own, and assumed in seeking it that it would. This flattered her. And as is always the case with women of the sort, she found it impossible to believe evil of a man of whom she so much desired to think highly. Opposition, moreover, was never tolerable to her, and opposition from any child of hers but Philippa savoured of rebellion; and rebellion was a sin. Therefore when Vicky railed, and rasped with her tongue, Mrs. Percival hardened her heart against Vicky; finally she told her to mind her own business. "You are accusing your sister—an innocent, pure-minded child—of downright wickedness," she told her. "I am forced to tell you that merely to think of such things does you little credit. Blessed are the pure in heart, my child. It is terrible to me to have to understand that one of my children can slander her younger sister." Mrs. Percival was apt to be the victim of her own eloquence. She mostly said more than she meant, and always too much. "As for Nevile," she went on—she called him Nevile nowadays—"he seems to me the model of a Christian English gentleman, who does not wear his heart upon his sleeve—ah—for daws to peck at. When I think of what agonies of mind

he must have undergone, of his manly forbearance, and almost more than manly reticence, I feel towards him as a mother to a son. I don't hesitate to tell you so. I am really grieved that you, my daughter, should have spoken as you have; and yet I had rather bear the insinuations you have thought fit to make against me, your mother, than—than—have you think them. That is truly shocking to my mind."

Vicky was not clear what this antithesis might mean, and said so. Mrs. Percival, who felt herself that there was something wrong with it, thereupon grew downright angry. She reared her head like a snake and struck sideways. "I will ask you to respect my grey hairs, Victoria. I will ask you to remember that, at present, you are under my roof. When I find that you can do one or both of these things I shall be prepared to talk with you; but not until then. May I now resume my work? My correspondence is heavy, and I cannot let it accumulate." Vicky retired, defeated.

And so we come to the events of the twenty-first of July, and a crisis: earthquake and eclipse.

On the morning of that day there had been riding in the Row. Vicky and Sanchia had ridden; Ingram had joined them, of course, and a Captain Sinclair. Later on, when Bill Chevenix had hailed them from the railings, Sanchia had waved her hand and cantered past, followed by Ingram; but Vicky had pulled up.

She had said to her cavalier, "I want to talk to

Mr. Chevenix a minute. I'll catch you up if you walk." Then she had drawn rein at the railings and she and Chevenix had exchanged glances.

"I say, you know!" was Chevenix's commentary upon affairs. Vicky nodded.

"It's this sort of thing every day. I wish we could talk about it. Could you come in this afternoon? There are people to tea. Could you?"

Chevenix declared that he really couldn't. "It's no good my promising, you know. I've got a dozen things I ought to do, and don't see a chance of doing half of 'em. That's the worst of having nothing to do, if you understand me; you always do too much. Now this afternoon there's——"

"I can't wait," said Vicky, her eyes upon the advancing Sinclair; "but I *should* like to see you. Something must be done. I think mamma's mad."

"She always was, between you and me," Chevenix said. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll drop in after dinner on my way to Grosvenor Square. About ten—eh? How would that do?"

Vicky shook her head. "We're going somewhere—I don't know where or when. It's almost certain to be useless—but come all the same." She reflected. "Yes, come," she said. "I'll be in—anyhow."

Chevenix waved her off. "Right. I'm there. Ten o'clock."

Before tea Vicky the untiring did contrive to say a word to Sanchia, whose woe-begone aspect suggested a crisis. "If you get a chance, I advise you

to stop all this to-day. I'll make one for you if I can. But, Sancie, it must be stopped."

"Must it?" Sancie echoed. "I suppose so."

"If you'd done it before, my dear," said the wise and candid, "it would have been better for everybody—including me. But even now you can make it all right. It will be awful for you. Yet —one does get over it quite quickly, you know." Sanchia, however, did not look like that sort.

The tea-party was neither more nor less than a sprinkling of dowagers in white gloves. Only one man was present: Ingram. He, abating no jot of his phlegm, brazened it out—so Vicky thought—in an amazing way. His matter-of-fact talk—to everybody but Sanchia—was precisely as usual; to Mrs. Percival he was the observant, collected son of the house—precisely as usual. But with Sanchia he betrayed himself; he was constrained and nervous; never looked at her, hardly addressed her a word. His hand shook as he carried her a cup, and she started violently when he came with it, lost the thread of what she had been saying to a Mrs. Somerset, turned white, then very red. Vicky sickened at the little scene, and took care that it shouldn't be repeated.

The women melted out by degrees, and then the brougham came for Mrs. Percival, who was going on an errand of mercy somewhere. She bustled away upon her occasions, and left Ingram standing by the long window and Sanchia by the tea-table, a love-lorn pair, and Vicky hovering between,

engaged with a belated arrival who had entered as the hostess went out. She must be talked to, fed, must have fresh tea, etc. All this Vicky had to see to, since by now nervous tension had brought Sanchia to speechless misery, and was setting Ingram at the quicks of his finger-nails. He did not move from his window or turn about. As for Sanchia, she drooped where she stood, white and drawn. This was a feverish ten minutes indeed: Vicky had never hated a woman so much as this complacent Mrs. Mate, one of those simple persons who spend the whole resources of a call explaining why they have made it. "And as I said to Mrs. Bruce, You see, if I don't get over to Great Cumberland Place to-day, I'm done for. Because we have something for every afternoon for the next ten days, and there we are in August, and of course we all fly away. So I cut her short—such an old, old friend, I really thought, on such a special occasion, there could be no harm in that; and was rewarded by a peep at Mrs. Percival, and a nice long talk with you, my dear. And your sister—dear Sanchia—of course. But that you should have made me a special brew—when I hardly deserve a how-d'ye-do—I must tell Mrs. Bruce about it—indeed I must." Ah, but she went at last, and Vicky, having bundled her out, now stood by the open door, wistfully looking from her young sister to the man by the window—pitiful, yet knowing it must be. Her eyes grew bright and dewy; she knew all about it! But one has these things to do, and must do them for oneself. Vicky,

however, poising, doubted and felt her tears. Sancie seemed to her so very young for this grim and tearing business. Then she sighed and went softly away, shutting the door behind her. I read that sigh as a prayer of Vicky's.

They stood apart, each sphered in an emotional veil, the man fighting his longing, and backing from it inch by inch, the girl abandoned to her love, the mystery, the wonder, the faint sweetness, and the pain. Each sphered as in a veil; yet apart as they stood, between them beat and flickered waves of warm air, and what one felt the other was conscious of. Sanchia drooped and swayed.

She shut her eyes and wavered where she stood. She rested one hand upon a table, the other hung listless. There was no fight in her at all. What must be would be, and such a death as this was strangely sweet. But Ingram fought, as never in his light-taken life; and he was being beaten, and knew it, and was now telling himself that the thing had to be. Every fibre of him wanted her, every reason played him traitor, and told him salvation lay her way. He saw nothing, realised nothing, but that she was behind him, throbbing and swaying there; that he had but to turn to her, and she was his.

The room seemed to darken, the air to grow thick and faint. The room swam and drew them together. She put her hand up to her neck, frightened; she stirred and shook the tea-things on the table. Ingram turned, looked at her, and came and

stood by her. She moved her eyes before her head, slowly, as if fascinated and drawn. Then she turned her face full; their eyes met; darkness, a stifling sense, a leap of the heart, and she was in his arms.

He held her fast there, but kept back his head that he might see something of her. Her face was hidden in his arm, but he saw her shoulders heave.

"Oh, God," he said, "Sancie, is this true?"

She lay close, not answering him for a while. Then she said, her face hidden, "Is what true?"

He must have her answer, if he drained it from her. "This—this—that you are here—and I—that you are mine, Sancie?"

And now she looked up, and in her pale face was a gleam of smiling, triumphant certainty.

"Yes," she said, "it's true. I can't help it. You must be good to me."

He almost laughed at her. "Good! Good to *you!* Oh, my dear——!"

"I suppose I'm wicked," she said, with her eyes vague and brows arched high. "I suppose I ought not to love you so. But how am I to help myself? And what ought I to do?"

"Love me for ever," he said, and met her lips.

The entry of a maid for the tea-things should have given them prudence, and her exit, leaving the door ajar, should have been noticed, but was not. Ingram, in the floodtide of his triumph, and Sanchia, in her wild surrender, had no eyes but for one another, and no voice but that of the lips. Thus

it was that Philippa, Mrs. Tompsett-King, tallest, boldest, deepest-bosomed of the Percivals, was admitted at the front door and entered the drawing-room and found them one figure. Their lips were locked; she was sighing her soul away upon his breast.

"Oh, Melusine!" she cried out sharply, and then, as they sprang apart and revealed themselves, "Ah, it is Sanchia!"

"Yes," said Ingram, doing all that there was now to do. "Yes, Mrs. King, and it's my fault."

Mrs. Tompsett-King, who disliked to be called Mrs. King, put on her most incisive manner.

"One supposes so. And, Mr. Ingram, to repair your fault——"

"Yes?" said Ingram, eyeing her resolutely. Philippa's answer was to look straight at the door and then back to him.

"I can't leave it at that, you know," he said. "But you and I need not discuss anything. I propose to wait until Mrs. Percival returns."

"So do I," said Philippa.

Ingram turned to Sanchia, picked up her hand and kissed it. "You're better out of this, my dear," he said. Philippa sat in a straight-backed chair and watched him openly.

Sanchia, very self-possessed, asked Ingram, "Do you want me to go?" He nodded.

"Yes, go, my dear. I've got to see this through. Your turn will come presently." Then she went without another word.

Ingram turned upon Philippa, but the lady put up her hand. "Not a word, if you please. As you hinted just now, rather broadly, this is no affair of mine. It is not, so far as you are concerned. I can't turn you out of another person's house, even my mother's; but I think you understand that I would if I could."

"I understand that perfectly," Ingram said. "I'm sorry to be inconvenient, but it is absolutely necessary for me to see Mrs. Percival—and Mr. Percival."

Philippa looked him full in the face. "In case you may decline to remove yourself at my mother's request, I may as well tell you that my father is dining in the city to-night, and can hardly be home before ten. There will be no men in the house until he returns. Therefore, if you wish to bully women, you can do it with perfect safety until ten o'clock—unless, indeed, my mother should send for the police."

This speech gave Ingram some perplexity. He felt every shrewd word of it, and it seemed to him that the longer he stayed the worse it might prove for Sanchia. He thought that he might have tackled Mrs. Percival, had she been the intervener, but that he would have a very poor chance with her now. Yet the idea of leaving the house, and Sanchia in it, alone to face her judges, was intolerable.

"You are not speaking very charitably, Mrs. King," he said as civilly as he could; "I can hardly believe that you mean all that. You must see that

I have to explain myself, and at the earliest moment."

"How do you propose to explain yourself?" asked Philippa squarely.

Ingram replied, "I think your mother must find that out first." He stayed on, standing with his back to the fireplace. No more was said.

Mrs. Percival's latchkey being heard, Philippa rose at once and left the room. Ingram stood doggedly his ground. After a terrible half-hour of it somebody came into the room. Vicky was before him. Ingram glowered at her.

"You had better go at once," she said.

"You know I can't do that," said Ingram.

"I beg that you will. You will make things worse than they are—if they could be."

Ingram set his jaw. "I must see your mother before I go."

"She refuses to see you. If you stop here I am to send for a policeman."

"Send for him by all means," said Ingram. Vicky rang the bell; and then he went downstairs. In the hall Mrs. Percival stood, bitter, white, and glittering. He should have been able to see, distracted as he was, that she was in that state of feeling when anything he said must have been too much.

But he began, "Mrs. Percival, in mere justice to your daughter——"

Mrs. Percival's eyelids glimmered. Her lips were

so tight they almost disappeared. "To which of my daughters do you refer?"

"Why, to Sanchia, of course," he said.

"I have no daughter of that name," said Mrs. Percival, and then to a maid as she came into the hall, "Parsons, the door."

At eleven o'clock came Chevenix, and was told that Miss Victoria was in the drawing-room. She met him with a blenched face.

"It's done," she said. "You're too late. It's done and all found out. Philippa's here, and mamma, of course, and papa too. They're at her now in the library. Oh, poor little darling! Poor dear little Sancie!"

Chevenix swore softly. "I'll kill Nevile," he said. "Damn him! I'll kill him for this."

"You'll kill her if you do," Vicky said. "I don't know her now. She'll never give him up."

"Oh, but—" Chevenix began; and Vicky ran on with her tale.

"She came straight upstairs and told me about it. She said, 'Nevile loves me, and we're engaged.' I simply gaped at her, simply gaped. She said, 'I know you don't understand me—but of course he's not married at all. He's suffered dreadfully, and I can be of use to him; and I mean to be. They may cut me in pieces, of course. That's the only way to stop me. I've made up my mind.' She spoke quite quietly—she's the only cool person in this house just now. She's not afraid of anybody,

and went down to those three as if she was going to a party. Oh, isn't it extraordinary to live with a person all your life, and find out that you've known nothing at all about them? She's a new person —she's not Sancie at all. She's a kind of witch of Atlas; she makes goose-flesh on you. You feel her all down your spine. I was almost afraid—afraid of Sancie!"

"Good God," said Chevenix simply.

"Papa, you know," Vicky told him, "is simply raving mad. He loves Sancie much more than any of us—and it seems to hurt him frightfully. He's in an awful rage with her—that's the worst of it. They all seem more angry with her than with Nevile Ingram. I can't understand it—unless it is because she's so deadly cool about it. It's really most extraordinary—that bit of a thing—two years younger than me—and never the least atom in love before (I'm certain of that. It's not her way at all). Why, one has uncomfortable scenes, you know, and is very unhappy for a bit. Of course one is; but it all seems part of the thing—I mean, you must expect to have a bad time when you've had rather a good one. But Sancie isn't like that at all. She's so serious; she always was very serious. She means to have her own way—somehow. I can see it. No—I don't know what's to be done —not the very least."

"I do," said Chevenix. "I shall go for the chap. He's queer, you know—but he's not a rascal—not altogether a rascal. He's been led away, you

know, Vicky—that's what it is. His feelings took him unawares, don't you see. But he's not a rank outsider, you know. You leave him to me. I'll pack him out of the country in a week—if you can hold on to Sancie."

Vicky shook her head. "I believe she'd follow him over the water. You've no idea what she's like now."

Their talk gloomed and died down into dreary silence. But they stayed on in the drawing-room, saying little or nothing, listening for the library door. At about half-past eleven it shut softly, and Sanchia came upstairs. They heard the swish of her silk petticoat.

Vicky darted out to meet her. "Come in here, dearest; do come to us. We're all friends here."

But Sanchia shook her head, and went upstairs. "She's like a ghost," Vicky said, "or as if she'd just seen a dead person."

CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE LIBRARY

Upon his return from city revels at the early hour of ten, Mr. Percival's mood of reverie, induced by sound digestion, suffered a rough awakening. He could not help contrasting the lights and *bravas* of the feast, the pleasant drive home in the well-sprung brougham—one arm luxuriously in the sling, the half of an excellent cigar in his teeth, alimentation happily at work and echoes of recently-heard optimism still tingling in his ears; all that, with the pity and terror of this home news. If he looked back wistfully to the great bannered hall as his very home, even to the cushioned carriage as a refuge, what wonder?

He had let himself in, after a cheery "Good-night, Bakehouse, good-night to you!"—under his arm snuggled the casket of sweetmeats for his daughters, in his mouth still the excellent cigar; and had been met in full hall by those two pillars of his house—that undoubted pillar, and that pillar by arrogation—his wife and his eldest child, Philippa Tompsett-King. "Ha, my dear! Ha, Philippa! here's the prodigal father come home," he had said. "Here's—" and then, seeing their tense faces, he had stopped, faltering. "What's up? What's hap-

pened? Good God, Kitty, can't you tell me?" He never called his wife Kitty except in moments of panic.

Philippa, pillar still of his house by her own arrogation, respected by him but not loved, spoke. "Mamma has had a great shock. I have remained with her. Will you come into the library, papa? We can speak about it there."

Mr. Percival had turned grey. "Don't torture a man," he had said; and then, ignoring Philippa, "Kitty, can't you tell me? Is it—are they——?"

Mrs. Percival struggled with her instinct for dramatic effect. It was on the tip of her tongue to say, "I have lost a daughter," but some providence restrained her. "No one is ill," she said. "Come into the library, papa." They called each other papa and mamma now, rather than Tom and Kitty.

"Phew!" sighed the poor merchant. "What the deuce is all this about?" They did their best, these two apparitors, to make him sit to a table—it had all been prepared, even to the family Bible. But he showed them so horror-struck a face that no ritual was insisted on. He was allowed to pad about the room, his hands deep in his pockets.

Philippa gave him her story, which lost nothing by plain recital. Her words were terribly simple. She ended by saying that Ingram had proved himself bully as well as blackguard, and had only gone when threatened with the policeman. Grey, worn, and old on a sudden, he followed her hard lips with his eyes, and pored upon her fine face as if spying

out for a grain of pity there. He said not a word; but he felt deep in his heart that he hated Philippa.

Mrs. Percival then took up her parable. Bad as Ingram was, or may have been (for she showed, I think, even now a tendency to excuse his hot blood), Sanchia's coolness was insufferably worse. Her "downright insolence," her deliberation, indifference to threats, adjurations, prayers, revealed (she said) a state of ingrained wickedness she could never have believed to be possible. She confessed that she was at a loss, did not know at the moment what to do; she was driven almost to confess that this chit of a girl had been too many for her; and in so confessing she betrayed, far more certainly than her husband had betrayed to himself, that she hated a daughter. Looking desperately from one to another, he could see no mercy for him.

Tom Percival—old Tom, as they called him in the city—was a simple-minded gentleman, not very intelligent, depending for his welfare largely upon the state of his stomach and the routine on which he had been reared. He loved smiling faces, a well-heaped board; he loved the brisk outset to the morning's work, and the happy home-coming, the day well done. He loved to be coaxed by pretty daughters, to have his knees climbed and whiskers pulled; it was delightful to him to know that his pockets were well-lined—that his nest was warm for his brood. He believed that pretty girls had pretty hearts and souls; there was something harsh and

jangling in the suggestion that they could ever jostle in the world and lose their bloom. There were bad girls, lost girls out there, no doubt: he could not bear to think of them, and he never did. Now to be told that his loveliest and dearest, his darling, his youngest, had vice—that she was tousled, rubbed, and smeared; that her sweet heart was hard in sin, and her young eyes bold in it—to be told this by anybody would have roused a fury of rage in him, and given him, nevertheless, misery enough. To be told so by his wife and eldest-born—by the wife who ruled his house and the daughter who ruled his wife—went near to making an old man of him, an old, old man who could only whimper and wag his silly hands.

This, in point of fact, is much what he did. He could not digest the tale, didn't know whether he "believed" it or not. He was shocked to the soul, his heart was sick. Sin and Sanchia! Vice and his darling! He could not confront such images, he dared not. He could have cursed these two women whom he feared so much; in his weakness he could have put his hands to his ears and let their words sear the air over his head. What he actually did was to appeal to them, falteringly and feebly, to let him see Sancie—alone.

"I can't understand—what's the meaning of all this? Pho! My Sancie— Never, never! There's been a dreadful mistake. You may have seen—I don't know what you saw, some of you—but—oh, you may depend upon it—a mistake. God help us

all! God have mercy upon us—for Christ's sake, Amen! Philippa, my dear, I do think you— You never understood the child, you know. There's a good deal in that—I'm bound to remember it. She was too young for you—I think, perhaps, mamma and I might—don't you know? We're her parents, my dear—and you've got duties——"

"My first duty seems to be to mamma," said Philippa, "but of course if you both wish me to go——"

"I do not wish it," said Mrs. Percival.

The distracted man appealed to his wife. "Kitty, if I could persuade you to give me—just twenty minutes—I'm perfectly certain—I'll stake my name on it, I could— We were always such chums, you know, my dear. She always told me her little secrets—I'm certain you're wrong—I'm dead sure of it."

"Then you suppose us to be liars?" said Mrs. Percival, no more than annoyed by his misery.

"No, my dear, no, no. Liars, indeed! How you take me up! But I confess—my little Sancie! Why, it's not to be thought of! Look here, my dear, I wish you'd let me go up to her—I do indeed. I've no doubt I can clear all this up—there's been some shocking mistake——"

Mrs. Percival was now in a state of white fury which he had been wise to have spared her and himself.

"If you wish to deny me access to my daughter, if you think me a slanderer, I should be glad for you to say so openly. If you think that——"

Philippa laid a hand upon her arm. "Dear mamma," she said, "I am sure that papa did not imply such terrible things."

Mr. Percival feebly waved his hands, and muttered with his dry lips. No sound came. Then Mrs. Percival, passing him swiftly, went upstairs and unlocked Sanchia's door. "Your father will speak to you," she said, and went down again immediately. With that sure sense of dramatic fitness, dramatic effect, which never deserted her, she took her stand, erect beside her sterner daughter (who did these things more naturally). The assessing pair of women stood, one on each side of the crippled man. He, prone before his troubles, leaned his elbows on the table and covered his face. I doubt if he prayed.

Sanchia came softly into the room, still in her gown of white *piqué*, her gown of a guilty afternoon. She looked slight and perilously frail, with her dead-white face and great vague eyes, a creature almost diaphanous, through whom you might have seen the heart throb and burn. But in truth she was amazingly strong. Those pale lips of hers had been sanctified, those unseeing eyes had seen their salvation. So she faced her assize undismayed.

She came softly in and stood by the table, resting the fingers of one hand upon it. Her mother and sister stood stiff as stone men in Egypt; Mrs. Percival's eyelids flickered in her face; Mrs. Tompsett-King's eyes stared wide before her into a florid portrait of Mr. Percival as a Freemason. The poor

merchant himself, unconsciously comic, peeped through his fingers at his darling, saw her a ghost, and with a shiver of miserable shock shut his eyes tightly and pressed his hands upon them.

Sanchia spoke first, after all, in a voice carefully level and quiet.

"Do you want to speak to me, papa?"

Mr. Percival groaned and looked up. He seemed twenty years older, a silvery film showed on his chin.

"Oh, Sancie! Oh, my darling!" Then he roared in his pain. "Speak to me—tell them they are damned liars!" A spasm crossed Mrs. Percival's rigid face; nothing moved Philippa's.

"But, papa, it's quite true. I do love Nevile. I told him so."

Mr. Percival, with one of those sudden jerks of the mind from certainty to incredulity, rounded upon her. "But you can't, you know, my child! It's preposterous—! Never heard such stuff in my life. How the devil can you love a man that's married? These things ain't done, you know."

Sanchia smiled, as if she pitied him. "How can I help it, papa? I do love him. Of course I love him. He knows that I do."

Mr. Percival stretched his arms out. "But he's married, child. Don't you see?" Sanchia's compassionate smiling moved Mrs. Tompsett-King to be incisive.

"That appears to be the pleasurable part of it."

As the culprit still smiled, Mr. Percival frowned. He cleared his throat. "Hum! Sancie, my dear,

this is a serious matter. It's not a thing to laugh at —certainly not."

"I wasn't laughing, papa," Sanchia said. "But of course I'm happy about it."

"Happy!" cried the Bench in divers tones. She waited, then spoke unmistakably her mind.

"I'm happy because I love him, and he knows it; and because he loves me, and I know it. I never thought I could be so happy as I am now." Mr. Percival stared at the door, beyond speech, doubting if he heard. Mrs. Percival took the stage.

"Do you wish to kill your father?" She fixed Sanchia with her eyes, but Sanchia was unmoved, because she was looking down.

"Why should papa be killed because I'm happy?" she asked mildly.

Having taken the stage, one must continue there, it seems. Mrs. Percival felt that one must. Therefore she said, "You have broken my heart, Sanchia."

Sanchia now looked at her for the first time. Her eyes were thoughtful. "Yours, mamma? I think you do wish me to be unhappy. Papa's different." Philippa would have leapt into the fray, but that Mrs. Percival put her hand out sideways and gripped her wrist.

Sanchia turned to her father. "I think, if you don't mind, papa, I'll go to bed. I'm rather tired —and I can't explain everything now."

As Mr. Percival didn't move to look at her, she said, "Good-night, papa," and went out.

When the two ladies had said what seemed fitting,

and Mr. Percival was left alone with his wreckage, the first thing his eyes took in was the gilded box of bon-bons which the Greengrocers' hospitality had heaped upon him. He had nursed it on his knee as the brougham bowled him homewards; when he had reached Oxford Circus he had taken it from its wrappages so that he might the more easily dazzle his Sancie's eyes when she came to him. Now as he thought of those simple pleasures of the evening, of those pretty hopes and promises, and saw them again against the background of this loss, he broke down and sobbed like a child.

CHAPTER XXIV

BRIXTON AS A "LOCUS PENITENTIÆ"

THIS world is very old, and very small, and very busy; it spins for its mere life, and whirls industriously round the sun, though in Great Cumberland Place a Mrs. Percival takes to the stage and declares that she has no daughter Sanchia, and a jolly merchant grows old before his time, and a pretty girl loses her heart with praise and thanksgiving for the loss. In spite of earthquake and eclipse in that well-found house on the 21st of July, the affairs of the world went rumbling on. Summer lumbered out towards autumnal cool mornings; leaves began to fall in the Park. Mr. Percival attended Board Meetings, and smoked cigars; Nevile Ingram, faultlessly dressed, stalked Saint-James's Street, and passed his friends without knowing them, a blank glare in his steel-blue eyes; Vicky rode in the Row, esquired by Captain Sinclair and Major Scott; the House of Commons knocked off its arrears and the Law Courts theirs—Scotland in full sight; and Sanchia Percival was teaching orphan children words of one syllable in Acre Lane, Brixton.

How she got there—after what miserable altercations, what hyperdramatic interviews with her mother, what claspings and sunderings with her

fond old father—it were long to tell. Ingram, denied her door, denied the door in The Poultry, wrote her letter after letter, but in vain. They were impounded by Mrs. Percival and returned, addressed in a flowing hand. The really serious impediment to compromise was this lady's sense of drama. She had declared to Ingram that she had no daughter Sanchia. From that moment it became certain that she could have none. But by this time—on general grounds—the girl's entire family was against her. Melusine ignored her peacefully; lifted her out of ken upon her fine eyebrows. Hawise, deep in the country, was told nothing, lest Sir George should be made ashamed. Vicky, after exhausting herself in argument, washed her hands of her sister, more in sorrow than in anger. Even Chevenix, the tried friend, the close ally, was compelled to tell her that nothing could be done with a girl who had ideas of the sort. "It's not to be thought of, Sancie. You can't ask it of any one. I'm frightfully cut up—in a way it's my fault. But you mustn't ask me to do anything, you know. Upon my soul, I couldn't to save my life. Nevile's been at me with letters over and over again—but it's no use. I'm sorry to death, old girl—but there you are. If I can't, I can't." And he was firm.

She was practically a prisoner, without one friendly face but her father's; and that was now averted, purely in sorrow, for he was incapable of anger against her. She could write no letters and

receive none. Neither her friend of the Open Country nor her lover of the serried town could serve her in her strait. All she could do—and that she did—was to live on what she had: hasty notes from Ingram—"Six on Tuesday; Shelley and you." "Do come to Hurlingham on Friday —the Lady too if *absolutely* necessary." "Wear one of these on Monday night, and may I have *all* the extras, please?"—some soiled dance programmes, some faded carnations, a little ring. She fed on these; but for medicine she had a greater store; letters, rambling, eloquent, aspiring, preposterous, hopeful, adoring, from the Open Country. But for them, she thought, her treadings would have slipped. They only kept her head above the flood in which she swirled. In them her course seemed plain; by them she steered.

She proved, indeed, an apt pupil of the Philosopher of Poverty. She was beggared, and happy to know it; the poorer she was the richer she felt. They had cut her off her lover, and she loved the longer; they had locked her in her room; she nursed him in her heart. With Ingram fast in there she was proof against her mother's icy stabs, her poor old father's tears. Unearthly proof, she held a level course. It came to be a matter of indifference where they put her or what they did. A locked door in Brixton? How was that worse than Great Cumberland Place? Cousin Letitia? Could she be more unnatural than mamma? She went to Brixton quite simply and without any farewells, but

one. She did contrive a whispered word to her father. "Good-bye, darling," she had said, her arms round his neck. "I shall write to you, you know, to the city, and you must answer." His immediate answer had been a frantic embrace. "God bless my precious, God give her to me again," had been all he could say. She had pressed closely to him, put her arms round his neck, and clung to him. "Darling, don't cry; please, please, don't. I'm not wicked at all, really. I'm trying to be good." Poor Mr. Percival had begun again, the old, interminable arguments. "You can't be good, my dear, if you won't go to church or see a clergyman." Her smile was very pitiful and very kind. "Darling, I can, and I shall be. Now, mind you write to me."

At the last minute—most characteristically—he had pushed an envelope into her hand. It contained a banknote for fifty pounds. Emotion with him most readily took that form. The only happy moment of his burdened month had been when he got that note from Wilkins at the bank. "How will you take it, Mr. Percival?" he had been asked, and had replied, quite unusually, "A fifty-pound note, Wilkins, if you please. A clean one if you have it."

Acre Lane, Brixton, contained the residence of Cousin Letitia, Miss Letitia Blount, who cultivated the theological virtues there, taught orphans, maintained herself, a maid, a canary, and a cat on three hundred pounds a year. She was Mrs. Percival's

first cousin, had had an early disappointment in love, which had turned her eyes to Evangelical Truth, and was now, at the age of fifty-seven, one of the gentlest and most charming of women. She was slight, hollow-chested, and grey-haired; she was tremulous, deprecating, and soft-voiced. She hoped all things, believed all things, except the possibility of evil. If sin, if crime, if clamour existed in the world, it is certain that she must know nothing of them if she were to live. It was said of her once that Miss Blount supposed all children to be born spontaneously under gooseberry bushes; and that if some were orphans (as her charges were), and some were not, it must be because some were found by happy ladies, and some by parochial inspectors. The worst she could say of anything was that it was not quite nice, the best of anybody that he was a believing Christian. Upon Sanchia's consignment to her care she had been given to understand that something not quite nice had in fact been in the wind; but the child, on arrival, saw very soon that her cousin could not believe it, and must not be allowed to suppose it. All must needs be for the best with Cousin Letitia, since to her this was the best world possible at present, a kind of forecourt of the Second Temple. "Darling child, I do hope you will be happy," had been Miss Blount's greeting, after an embrace. "Of course I shall, Cousin Letitia," she had been told, "if you'll let me do something." Miss Blount had referred to the orphans who were folded next door. "I'll teach

them spelling," Sanchia promised, "if you don't think I shall corrupt them." This had been in the first ten minutes before she knew her Cousin Letitia; the scare with which the sarcasm was received taught her better. "Corrupt them, my dear! Oh, how could that be possible?" Sanchia had kissed her and apologised for a very bad joke. Miss Blount, made aware of a joke, produced a smile, and said that it was capital fun. Thus they came to an understanding by force of which Sanchia's private life and public conversation had no relation whatsoever to each other.

Outwardly she was the cheerful instructress of a score of pale-faced, smartly-combed children, feeder of a canary, tender of a cat. She made talk with curates and district visitors, did woolwork in the evenings, or sometimes read *The Sunday at Home* aloud while her Cousin Letitia knitted comforters for railwaymen. She did her hair smoothly, parted it in the middle, dressed plainly, was always good-tempered, and never showed depression. Miss Blount called her her ray of sunshine, and wrote long letters with a very fine pen to her cousin Kitty Percival, which that lady seldom read to the end. She gave no trouble, seldom wanted to go out beyond the garden, was never late for prayers or unready for bed. One would have said of her that the punctual performance of everyday duties was her only happiness. Miss Blount, who saw in method a clear forecast of our heavenly state, told Mrs. Percival that dear Sanchia had only wanted

work to prove herself a pattern to us all. "Her very first words to me," she wrote, "were that I must let her 'do something.' My good cousin will forgive me if I remind her that to go about doing good was the divine ensample set us in the beginning."

Prayers over, good-night said, behind her chamber door the other Sanchia glowed and stood revealed, the priestess of Heavenly Aphrodite. Her splendid state of Lover and Beloved, of chooser and chosen, rayed out from her heart, till she stood up transfigured, glorified, and inspired. She had no unhappiness, no misgivings; the glorious certainty of her love made any doubt of her beloved an impossible impiety. Here alone in Brixton stood she, Sanchia, loving, loving, loving; there alone in London stood her Nevile, loving, loving. She faced the window, carefully north-west, she stretched out her arms, "I am yours, Nevile, yours, and you are mine." What else mattered? "Though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

Transfigured by love as she was, she was also translated. She became as gods, unconcerned with the good and evil which temper and try the consciences of men. The little customs of the world seemed negligible to her now, lifted as she was to heights beyond its atmosphere. In that star-strewn space where now she soared men and women could not breathe at all. How then could she but pity

them? In such moods as these she used to write to her devoted father, "I want to tell you about Nevile and me, because I want you so much to see exactly how we feel about it, and to show you that we aren't so wicked as you think. We aren't wicked at all, but simply love each other. . . . I don't understand how his being married can make any difference at all. He doesn't love her, and will never see her again. He doesn't injure her in any way. In fact, it is very much the contrary, because she has hurt him dreadfully. She must be a horrible person. . . . You can only love one person at a time, you see; and what *can* it matter what person you love so long as you are quite sure? I shall never be able to understand that it can be right to live with a person you don't and can't love. That seems to me just as wrong as not to live with a person whom you do love, and who loves you. In each case you would be doing harm to somebody, and that can't possibly be right. No one thinks so." To such impassioned reasoning as this The Poultry could only reply with groans, and petitions to a darling child not to disgrace us all.

How she raged! "Disgrace you, papa dear!" cried the fire-fraught priestess. "How can my love for Nevile be a disgrace? Nobody told Hawise that it was disgraceful to love George, or Philippa that she was wicked to love Septimus. Is it because poor Nevile has been treated shamefully, and has been unhappy for six or seven years that it's disgraceful? Do you want him to go on being wretched

all his life? Or do you mean me, papa? Is it disgraceful of me to be in love, or to want to make Nevile happy? I simply don't understand you, and I wish I did, because I'm *sure* you don't mean that." What reply could The Poultry have but a groan?

But the world ran its course all the same. August emptied London, and the Percival household went to Cornwall for its holidays. At the end of the month came Sanchia's birthday, her twenty-first, and she proceeded to action.

She had written to Senhouse shortly after her exile that she was staying with her cousin because of trouble at home. A "difference of opinion," she had called it, but had gone no nearer to the facts. The letter, directed to the care of Mr. Charnock at Bill Hill, had been some while in finding its consignee; he had replied to it at length with an impersonal cheerfulness which had given her a slight chill. She had been used to a more ardent service from him, and missed its warmth. However, he had said, "Don't fail to let me know how I can serve you. You promised me that, and if I can put aside all the promises I made to myself, you must leave me yours for comfort. So, mind you, I shall rely upon you."

To that she replied that she had not forgotten her promise; "in fact," she said, "I am rather near asking your advice just now. I can't very well write about it, but should like to see you before long—when I have carried out what I intend to do."

Before he could answer her she had taken her own counsel and left her Cousin Letitia's sanctuary for the vague.

Then she wrote to him from Beauchamp Place to the following effect:—

"My dear Jack, I was sent to Brixton by my parents because they thought I was being extremely wicked; and I have left it now that I am of age because I should feel myself to be really wicked if I stopped there any longer. I have written a long letter to papa explaining everything, and shall go to see him in the city directly he comes back. I am going to support myself, exactly as you did, and am learning type-writing, shorthand, and book-keeping at a school in Chancery Lane. This is *my* way of walking to King's Lynn. I hope you won't disapprove of me.

"You know how troublesome I find it to explain things, so I won't try. I have been very unhappy at times, and so I am now when I let myself get depressed; but I am very busy, and it doesn't often happen. If you were here you would understand everything without any difficulty. Do you think that you could come and see me? It would be awfully nice of you. I don't quite know what to do about a friend of mine. I think you met him once. Mr. Nevile Ingram, his name is. Do you remember, we met you in the Park, the day before you left town? That was in June; and seems to have been *years* ago. I haven't seen Mr. Ingram since the 21st of July, a month before my twenty-

first birthday." There was more, but nothing nearer to the point, about which, in writing, she might have circled for ever. But there was a postscript which said, "Cousin Letitia was extremely kind to me; but I felt that I could not possibly stay there after I was old enough to act on my own judgment. It would have been wrong to other people, as well as not fair to me."

Senhouse telegraphed, "Coming to-morrow," and she in fact found him waiting for her when she returned from a visit to her father in the city.

That visit must be explained. Mrs. Percival, on receipt of a letter from her Cousin Letitia, had publicly cast Sanchia from her bosom. The family, silent and scared, had heard her do it, and had apparently acquiesced. Only Mr. Percival, the tormented merchant, had found guile. For three days he had borne about with him, and upon him, his deceit. Then he had received a pre-arranged telegram from his clerk calling him to the city. He had gone up, unsuspected; and within six hours of his leaving home his Sanchia had been in his arms.

CHAPTER XXV

MR. SENHOUSE, HAVING SOWN, IS ENGAGED TO REAP

SHE came in about half-past six, her books under her arm. She was bright-eyed, clear-skinned, and looked thoroughly self-sufficing. He saw in a moment that she did not fail of courage. Her eyes danced at the sight of him; her hand was glad of his.

"So this is King's Lynn!" said Senhouse, and she nodded happily.

"King's Lynn. Mine! But on sixty pounds. I am behind you there."

"Oho! Yes, you're a capitalist. But I think it's as well on the whole. You remember that I adjured you not to make the journey."

She was thinking now; the first elation had gone. Now she had to make her actions good.

"Yes, of course I remember. I don't think I ever intended to follow you literally; I'm sure I didn't. But one gets forced into corners, and has to take the best way out one can. Generally, I suppose, there's only one way out of a corner."

"There are always two," Senhouse said, who was watching her closely. "One is to stay in the corner."

That she admitted, not shirking his scrutiny.

"I know. Of course I thought of that. I believe I have thought of everything."

He said gravely, "I am quite sure that you believe it." She showed him her gratitude, and at the same time allowed for his scruples.

"You think I ought to have waited? It was almost impossible—really. If you knew everything——"

He stopped her there. "Of course, I don't know everything. Since your letter came I have surmised at large. Will you let me put it bluntly. Your complications are, no doubt, of the usual kind?"

She was pinching her lip, her foot on the fender. "No," she said, "not quite usual. At least, I think not. N— Mr. Ingram is married."

He had not been ready. He was scared and could not help showing it. Yet all his wits went to work to hide his agitation.

"That's a complication, indeed. I hope you'll think of everything—again." He saw that he must keep his head at every cost.

Whatever he did with his, her head was now high. There was no lip-pinching, no watching of toes working in shoe-leather. Her eyes were those of a dreamer, but her voice was very steady.

"When one feels as—when one knows what I know—there is no need to think at all, in a sense. But of course I have worked it all out—what it means. My people don't understand—naturally. They think me very wicked. Mamma says that

I am not her daughter, and the others seem to agree with her. Whatever happens it is quite certain I can never go home again. Even papa thinks so. I have just been with him. He was sweet to me —as he always is. But he doesn't understand—as *you* will." She looked to him now, by a sudden twist of mood, like a child to its parent, confidently, as of right.

There was no time to think of himself. She needed everything he had to give. Everything he had was hers; but what had he which would serve?

He kept silence, treading the room softly on feet like a cat's, hands behind his back, and his head bent forwards and sideways, like that of a bicyclist riding through rain. He was not thinking, he was incapable of that; but he was feeling, as never before in his life. She watched him from her place by the fender, and presently, as he did not speak, she herself took up the tale.

She began on a low fierce note, a speech which ran from scorn to wailing, and so on to a long musical cry of pure passion, indescribably holy to him, and touching. "She—! To have love given her—his love—his name—hateful, wicked, a devil, not a woman. He was young when he married her—he was as young as I am. But she took his love and threw it away. In less than a year she left him—with some one else— He has never seen her again —for eight years—but he knows what she has done. It has been torture to him; it has changed him. He thought, until a little while ago, that he could

never be happy again. He hasn't told me what he has done—to forget her and himself—but I know, I know—of course I know how he has had to live."

He heard, he felt the trembling of her voice, and knew that her whole frame was throbbing with her passion. Look at her he dared not yet. Alas, for her youth! That such as she should champion such as Ingram must be.

"You told me once," she went on, "that I might live so—in such a way—as to be useful to other people; you said that the Woman's Art was to express herself. You told me that I had it in me to be such an artist. I don't think I dared believe it, because I knew that you were always too kind to me, and thought too highly of me. But then—afterwards—I began to see, couldn't help seeing, that I did make Nevile happier, and quieter. He told me so, but I could see it without that. He used to come and read with me—things which you taught me to understand and to value. Things that he used to do—that amused him once—bored him afterwards. He used to accuse himself sometimes, and then tell me what he meant to do at Wanless, where he lives—all his duties to his people there. I couldn't help seeing that I had been some use to him, and so I felt grateful to you for having shown me what I could do. . . . He told me that he had liked me from the very first; but I don't know that I liked him until Christmas Day, when we went to church, and received together. . . ."

Senhouse too remembered a Christmas Day,

when he in Cornwall watched her bowed head in London, and followed every stave of her prayers.

"It was in the spring that he told me he must leave me, and I couldn't understand what he meant. I saw that he was unhappy about it, but I wasn't —very—because I knew then that I liked him, and guessed that he liked me. I saw you afterwards and wanted to talk to you about it, but I couldn't —for all sorts of reasons. . . .

"Then I came back to town, and he told me all about it."

She stopped here, smiling pitifully. With such great things behind—such splendours of sea and sun-painted sky—to be concerned about so small a thing as this of Nevile's entangled feet. Oh, how absurd they were, who did not love! As if one could not adore the miracle of twilight because of a worm writhing on the ground!

"My people, it seems, had known it before, and thought nothing about it. They let him come to see me just the same. That's what I don't understand about mamma. She trusts you, and then, suddenly, believes nothing you can say. But I know now that she always hated me—though she used to like Nevile—and now she hates him because of me. I hope I shall never see her again. She makes me shudder all over. I always shudder at hatred and coldness. I'm afraid of her; she makes me doubt God. But it makes no difference, of course. One has one's duty so clear before one sometimes—that no cruelty could possibly matter.

Papa's not at all like that. Papa loves me—and I love him. I can't bear to hurt him—he knows I can't. But if I can make Nevile happy, and make him good—how can I help myself?"

Before he could voice either his adoration or his pain, she had entered into the tideway of her passion.

"They say that I disgrace myself—but do I care for that? I can help him, I can make him good—he has told me so—I know it. Why do people love each other—and have such beautiful thoughts, if they are wicked? Why is it that to be in love makes you religious, happier in church than anywhere, and interested in things which you don't notice at all when you are just playing about in the world—in society—and at parties and things like that? It's not only my own case—it's Nevile's too. We like the same things—simple, natural sort of things, like saying prayers, and reading poetry, and—all the things that *you* like. It makes us more like you, you know; and no happiness we have got out of society has ever been half so dear. I know, I know what our lives would be—together. You told me yourself that no harm could come to a good woman—and I am not at all afraid of Nevile. How could I be? He loves me. And what does the world matter to us if we have each other and feel like that? What can anything matter if your conscience is clear? Nothing will ever make me believe that it's disgraceful to make a man happy and good. And I can do that; he's told me so—and, besides, I know it."

She stopped suddenly, in full career. Beside this

certainty, not to be voiced, all protestations and proofs seemed vain. But though her tongue was still, the fire which had urged and now checked it went beating through her, and made her beauty glow—with an intensity at once warm and grave. To Senhouse, loving her without hope or earthly desire, she seemed a thing enskied: a message, not a woman. It would have been to him, at that moment, an impiety out of all belief to question or to doubt.

Senhouse, a poet, loved her and saw her in heaven, but Senhouse, the man of humours, recognised her for a girl in love. Adoration strove in him with most gentle pity; admiration with deadly fear. Ignorant, was she? Fearing nothing because she nothing knew? Maybe so: yet how noble was an ignorance like hers! Ah, how could he fail to see her nobility, that would throw all to the winds for the sake of a man? And how could he fail to be afraid, knowing the man? He had seen him but once, for a few minutes, but had known him for what he was at a glance. You walk the world's ways for a few years, and meet Ingrams by the score. Your clamative sort—born in the purple—your ask-and-have, your lord-of-the-earth, to whom women, dogs, horses, seats at feasts, acres and ease fall as a matter of course. Was there anything in his visible world which Ingram had seriously wanted and had not had? Nothing. Had he yet, any single time, seriously wanted a thing worth having? Never once, never once. Had he ever curbed a rage, stifled a lust, smothered a need, that his neighbour's state

might be the more gracious? Not he. And was this inspired creature, this pure embodiment, this holy thing to be thrown out to him because he called for it? Pity the poet, pity the man of humours.

No harm can ever come to a good woman. No; but horrible hurt is done the world when such an one is put in peril. The moral sense is shocked, the standard falls; if the flag flies still it flies as a braggart and a liar. Women, in his view, are so infinitely higher in the moral scale than men, being capable of lengths of enthusiasm and sacrifice which men never even become aware of, that mere honour is stultified if such a danger is allowed. The state of a man becomes revolting if such a danger is possible. Apart from the pity of the thing, there was that to be put from the man's side. Was it possible that Ingram himself could suffer this exquisite creature, this Temple of Beauty, to become a vessel for his common use, or a medicine for his disordered soul? The thing had but to be put to him, surely, Senhouse felt, to be exhibited as monstrous offence.

He saw now in his bitterness what his own part had been. He had seen her to be lovely and had told her she was lovely; he had known her for a saint and inspired her to be saintly. She was now on fire to be to Ingram all that she had been to himself. And how could he tell her, You have been a Spirit of God to me, but can never be so to him? He is not worthy of you, though I *am* worthy? How say that? He could have laughed aloud in his ag-

ony as he put the question to himself. Yet the dilemma was very real. He was to learn, it seems, that if you tell a lady she is a Goddess it is not possible for you afterwards to complain that she acts like a Goddess, to whom "good" and "evil" are empty words, as empty as "pity" and "terror" to a thunderstorm.

Here was the dilemma in the which he writhed: Sanchia Percival walked a Goddess upon earth, or she walked there a simple maid. If she walked a Goddess, what had he to say against her deliberate purpose? If she did not, how had he been fool enough to think so, or knave enough to tell her so? Had he done her reasonable honour by his testimonies, or had he lured her on to dishonour and shipwreck? You may blame him if you must, pity him if you can.

I don't suggest that all these thoughts ran orderly through his brain at this moment when, her speech failing her, he stood by her side, her hand taken to his lips, his eyes wistfully upon her bent head. Rather, they had whirled and run riot in him throughout her apology, not forming themselves into lines of attack, but fighting him singly, out of ambushes, running in and stabbing where they found him exposed. He felt, indeed, standing there hand-fasted, adoring her youth, a singular fool; but her need was so much greater than his plight that he could not afford to think of anything but her.

Standing above her there, her caught-up hand to his lips, his adoration spurred back his loyalty, and

his loyalty called up his faith. He now came to see her courage so far above his own, the pupil so high above the master, that he was ashamed of his fears. No harm ever yet came to a good woman. No, and here was a woman—woman? a young girl, rather, on the threshold—ready, unarmed, to prove his words. All honour to her, even to mortal risk! He was a Stoic by temper and training, to whom the rubs of the world upon the body seemed as nothing against the serenity of the soul. It would have been rank disloyalty to doubt of her soul: must she not then endanger her fair body?

She looked up presently into his face; her far-seeing, serious eyes sought deeply into his. "Well," she said. "Speak to me. Tell me what you think."

He said, "I think now as I thought when I saw you first, long ago. Do you remember the lily-pond?"

Her thoughts had been far away from that, but she turned them at once, remembered, and smiled. "Yes, of course I do. But what did you think of me then?"

"I saw you, in your white frock, setting your foot into bottomless black. And I was afraid."

Hurt filled her eyes with tears, she withdrew her hand. "I never thought you would speak to me like that."

He caught her hand again. "Don't turn away from me. Think. What did I do?"

After a moment he saw the smile steal over her lips. "You floated me on your raft—your bed."

He kissed what he held of her. "I must float you again. I dare do nothing else."

"Yes," she said. "I knew you would. But you floated yourself too—on the pond. And it was you who pulled most of the weeds off the lilies."

He laughed rather ruefully. "Did I? Well, it's a man's business to do most of the weeding—since women bear the flowers. But the analogy won't hold—we've got to the end of it. This time it is you who must float."

She glowed, triumphant. "Yes, I know. But you will have to launch me."

"Ah, my dear, my dear," he said, "and then I must stand and watch you from the shore."

Her mood was now merry. "You'll be like a hen with a brood of ducklings—exactly."

"More exactly than you think," he told her.

"Dreadfully fussy with your wings, and poking your head like a snake. You don't believe that I can swim, you know—not in the least."

"Spare me, my dear," he said, with a wry smile. But she was in a mood of little mercy.

"I don't see why I should. I think the hen on the bank is an untrustful bird. You don't trust me—your own pupil. You can't deny it."

"Queen Mab," he said, "sit down and let's have it out. It isn't you I distrust, but the world you live in. It's a grudging, uncharitable world. It's not fit for the likes of you. Remember that it burned Joan of Arc, and spat at Charlotte Corday as she went to her death. Do you think it would allow

for your gallantry, or put down your deeds to singleness of mind and a pure heart? Do you know what would be said of you? Thank God you don't. And you never shall if I can help it. These things hurt, you know: the mud they throw may be clean stuff—the whole earth is clean, as far as that goes—but the act is brutal, the intention is vile, and brutality and obscenity bruise and sear you. Perhaps you are strong enough to hold your head high against them all—I believe that you are—but your heart must needs harden under the trial, and I can't bear to think of it. You would be shocked beyond repair. They would deny you common civility, they would leer in your face; you would be denied your God in His Church. You say, These things are nothing, and remind me that you make your own God and your own lover. That's true—but, my beloved, so does he—so does your Nevile Ingram. He makes you too, out of what he has and what he finds. How is he going to take ignominy, ostracism? How is he going to take *you*, who will get the worst of it—after our courteous fashion? Don't think I am belittling him—how could I think ill of a man who loves you? I know nothing of him but that; and God knows that's in his favour. I am sure that you could weather the gale—I wonder if *he* could, though. I judge what you propose—personally—by what I think of marriage. It's the act of common desire, man for maid, maid for man, which is the Sacrament, not the Church rite. I don't object to the Church rite as such. Of

course I don't. It's the legal implication, and the moral that I think so wicked. *But*, take it as you will, there's the sanction of the Church, with use and wont behind it. These things at present weigh much with the world. Can you ask me, loving you as I do, to put you so far in the wrong in the world's eyes? No, no, I couldn't do that. It's not possible. I told you that I could never marry a woman that I loved, because I feel that it would insult her. That's my own feeling, and allow me to say that though you had my whole soul at your feet—as you have had—I would sooner let it lie there than ask you to marry me, or to do anything else. Because I love you I must give up all hopes of you. And so I did, long before you showed me that I could have no hopes at all. That's true. But I must ask you this plainly: Does Ingram think like that? And do you? Would he not marry you tomorrow if he could? Would you not marry him?" He waited for her answer, and got it only from her eyes. These, after a moment, were lifted to his own, looked deeply into them, and gave him what he had known before.

"You are the soul of truth," he said, "and have answered me. I don't know that I need say any more about that."

But she told him plainly that there was more to say. "You have not answered me at all," she told him. "We love each other, and he needs me. I know that. Can I deny him what he needs?"

Senhouse was very grave. "I can't answer you.

I ought not to, in any case—but the fact is that I can't do it. If *he* had put the question, I could answer him—and so I shall, I believe." He had added that, as if talking to himself; but it lifted her head quickly.

"What do you mean? Do you mean that you shall go to Wanless?"

"Is that where he lives? Yes, I think I shall."

She flushed all over, and her eyes grew bright. "I don't think you ought to do that."

"I think," he said, "that I shall ask your leave to go there."

She looked away, put her chin in her hand, and thought intensely. Leaning so, she asked him between her teeth, "What should you say to him if you went there?"

"Very much," he replied, "what I have said to you—only I should put it differently."

"He would be angry," she said.

"He would be rightly angry," said Senhouse. "It would be insufferable, but I want to do it all the same."

She tried coaxing first, very womanlike. "Why should you put yourself in a false position for my sake? Why should you let Nevile think you a——"

"A prig?" asked Senhouse. "A busybody? My dear, that's my punishment. I've got to eat my slice of pie."

"What *do* you mean?" she asked him, frowning.

"I've been an awful fool, you see," he told her.

"I begged you not to walk to King's Lynn, and thought that was enough. But it wasn't. I had shown you the road too clearly. Now, so far as I can, I have to get you back again."

She rose and looked down at him. She was very pale. "I ask you seriously not to go to Wanless. There are many reasons——"

"Don't I know that?" he said, shaking his head. "There are hardly any reasons why I should. And yet there is one."

She hesitated, and her colour came back. She was now blushing. "I have one reason which perhaps you won't understand. If you go there, Nevile may think—might think—that you came from me."

"I had thought of that, of course," he said. "I can reassure you. He won't think so, because now I see how far I have to go on my humiliating road. I have to incur your anger. I have to lose your affection." He couldn't bear to look at her. "So be it! It's logical enough."

They were both in a high state of tension. Her fluttering nostrils, her fixed eyes showed the strife within her breast. "If you think fit to do what I have begged you not to do—" she began to say, and then she broke down. "Don't give me up," she pleaded, and held out her hands. He, with a short cry, was before her, and took them both.

"Oh, my blessed one," he said. "Now I can go through Hell's gate for you."

He kissed her two hands, turned, and left her.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN WHAT MANNER MR. SENHOUSE MADE SO BOLD

He caught the night mail to Felsboro', and arrived in that stone-built outpost of the hills at three o'clock in the morning. Wanless Park was nine miles distant, deep in the fells, they told him. He trudged wet roads, gossamered sheep-tracks, skirted ferny hollows or brimming becks, climbing steadily, husbanding his breath. The exercise was grateful, for his mind was ill at ease. He thought, as he sat presently amid boulders on a height and waited for the dawn, that if he wasn't a fool it couldn't be for want of telling himself what a fool he was.

The laggard October sun came palely up and made the mountain gloom more sensible. A great blanket of fog hid the glen where Wanless lay, folded between the breasts of the hills. The poet in him was acold; the man of humours smiled askance. "Here's rue for you, Senhouse," he told himself; "your rhapsodies sevenfold back into your bosom. Rhapsody incarnate, and her own singer, she was—fired and ardent at her racing-mark—ready to spring away at the word! 'Tiptoe for a flight!' my gallant, dauntless one! Monstrous in me to doubt her—a shame to my own

professions. Mine is the *gran' rifiuto—she* will never shirk. I know that, and could worship her for it. She's right, she's right—of course she's right. She, Sanchia, arrayed in her white armour of innocence—Innocence, O God, and twenty-one! —against the prestige of this world. Safety, Sanction, the Uses of five thousand slavish years; Church and World, Gods and Devils, priests and people, home, law, order, Bible and prayer-book—rank upon rank of them, crosses, eagles, flags, and standards up—against young Sanchia the white, armed only with her heart on fire. What a battle—the myriad against One—and I range with the hordes against my saint!

"How shall we do, the myriad of us? Shall we trample her out? Not so: we have a way more excellent. We stare her cold—till she stare at us again out of her frozen eyes, stark, stiff, her mouth still open with that Oh! of her first shock. We stare long and steadily, we spare no detail. Ah! we say, 'A wanton! curious!' We point her out —mud-stains (of our own making); a tear in her gown (we clawed her there); a brazen eye (whose use we taught her); a flushed cheek (fresh from our flouts)—ay, ay! a wanton indeed! Hold your robe back, priest, lest she soil you. Use your handkerchief, dear madam, cover your nose. Eyes right, children, here's no sight for you. Gentlemen, please, we will sing to the praise and glory of God '*The Voice that breathed o'er Eden.*' That's how we do. It's a lingering death—that kind.

She defies us. Her Oh! is long coming; for at first, look you, she laughs. God help us all, the child is happy. What's her joy then? Service! She thinks she is serving. 'He loves me,' she says, 'and I love him. He needs me, and I give myself. I can make him happy—I can make him good. He told me so—and I know it.' Impiety, which is worthy of death. She's a publican, she's a sinner. Courage, ye hosts of man! Shut your New Testaments—put 'em away. Stare on, point your fingers, nudge each other, say, 'Look, look!' Look long enough, nudge hard enough, mouth your scorn; she'll gasp her little 'Oh!' presently, and freeze from within—from the shocked heart to the parted lips. There—what did I tell you? She's gone grey; her lips are cold. Lot's wife! No, but she's a pillar of ice—a frozen Oh! that was once a young girl in love."

He had lashed himself to frenzy, ranging that soaked mountain-top. Slowly, as he shook himself free of his rage, the fog-bank parted and steamed upwards. There below him, grey in the heavy trees, he saw Wanless Hall and blue smoke from more than one chimney. Terraced and trim before it the gardens ran down to Wan river, nobly behind it lay Wanless Park—massed oaks and elms, brackened glades, feeding deer, a herdsman crossing the carriage-drive, his dog at his heels.

Senhouse counted the smoking chimneys. There were three. "The kitchen, the hall, and, since the morning's chilly, a fire in my young lord's dressing-

room. What's the time? Eight o'clock, I put it. He must have another two hours. I'll go and forage for breakfast."

He descended into the valley road, got a hunch from a cottage, and washed it down with burn water. He smoked a pipe, two pipes. By that time the poet was cool, and the man of humours could make himself heard.

"We are both right—clearly. She is right to be there—certainly right. I am right to be here, at work against her. I could do nothing else. Is she to put her foot into bottomless black, and I not stop her? Why do I stop her? Because I fear the black about her stainless white? Because I love her white and should fear her black? Not so, for it may easily be that black's as good a wear as white. *Que sçay-je?* Your reason, Senhouse, is that the world has laid it down, White's the wear for women. It comes to that, my friend, wriggle as you will. White's the wear for women; because, don't you see, if they wear anything else, how's a man to know what he's buying? And where's commerce? where's property? Whose son is mine? Oh, you fool, you fool!

"Not so, however. If the world says, Women must wear white, so long as the world is so, white they must wear. Who is the man living who dares put his darling in black? Not old Percival, the fond merchant; not Senhouse, the fond lover. It can't be: let the girl die first. So we must say if we are to save our souls.

"Now, pray observe precisely what I am about to do. I meet a man, whose type I know and abhor. I say to him, 'Fellow, you are abominable to me; but Sanchia loves you. You shall take her for your misusings, you, who are not fit to look at her footprint in the sand, you shall take her, and make her wretched. It must be so, for she loves you. But you shall only take her in such a way that she can never escape from you but by death; for so the world has decreed—that women must wear white satin.' That's to be my pleading, and it cannot be anything else. It's the pleading of old Percival too. He and I, we agree, are on the side of the Angels." The poet in him lifted clenched hands to heaven. "The Angels, O God!" The man of humours dropped them limp to his sides. "No more, my friend, no more. Eat your slice of pie, and be done with it."

The man-servant stared at the strange visitor, whose bright eyes only, and cool tones, proclaimed the gentleman. Mr. Ingram was certainly at home —and he would inquire. Had the gentleman a card? The gentleman had no card. What name might he say, then? Mr. Senhouse; Mr. John Senhouse. Very good.

Report was duly carried into the breakfast room, where Mr. Ingram was lighting a long cigar, that —yes, on the whole, yes—"a gentleman to see you, sir. A Mr. Senhouse."

Ingram paused with the match flaring in his

hand and looked sideways. Bu he lit his cigar to a glowing heart before he said anything.

Then, "Mr. Senhouse? Who's he, Jackson?"

Jackson couldn't say, sir; but thought a strange gentleman, perhaps a foreign gentleman. He added in excuse, "Very wild, sir."

"Wild, is he? All right, Jackson; I'll have a go at him in here."

Jackson retired; Ingram rose and stood with outstretched legs before the wood fire—the Englishman's fighting position. He raised his chin that he might settle his hunting-stock, which he wore instead of a collar and tie. It was pale blue in colour, manifold, fastened with a gold safety-pin. For the rest of him, he was in breeches and gaiters—breeches whose arching thighs were to the thin knees like the curves of two crescent moons set horns to horns; gaiters, than which none ever came from Jermyn Street to make a pair of sturdy calves more like mahogany bed-pillars. Thus he waited, cigar in mouth, for Mr. Senhouse. As for his face, he transformed that on the opening of the door to a blankness common to his type of host.

Senhouse, open at the neck and loose at the knees, swung forward with his hand out.

"Good-morning, Mr. Ingram. You remember me, perhaps."

Ingram slowly shook hands. "Yes, I think so. How d'ye do? Beastly day!"

"The fog is lifting," Senhouse said. "You'll

have it hot here by noon." Ingram was looking out of window.

"Hope so! Dare say you're right. Have you breakfasted, by the way? Because, if not—" He turned to the bell.

"Thanks! Yes, I did. Don't get anything for me."

Ingram was warming his hands, and still looked very blank and bland. But he was at work, for all that, as his question should have told the visitor.

"Came up by the night mail, I suppose?"

Senhouse, however, did not see it. "Yes," he said. "It's a good one. A little too good. It landed me at Felsboro' at three o'clock in the morning."

"Awful, I know," Ingram said, looking about him at nothing in particular. "If you'd wired me I'd have had you met." Then he struck out for himself. "How did you leave Miss Percival?" he asked, and looked straight at his man.

But he got nothing by his bold attack. Senhouse, who never saw implications, always welcomed simplifications. He liked Ingram for being direct.

"She seemed to me perfectly well. I haven't seen her since that afternoon when I met her with you."

"I remember," said Ingram. "Won't you sit down? Perhaps you'll smoke?"

Senhouse accepted the cigarette-box, and sat himself down. "You've made things easy for me—

or easier," he said, "by asking after Miss Percival. We're great friends, you know." Ingram nodded, but had nothing to say. Senhouse went on.

"We have been so for over two years. We met in the house of a common friend, one Lady Mauleverer. Miss Percival was interested in my affairs, and perhaps I may say that I became interested in hers. We have met occasionally, and corresponded frequently. I used to help her with her water-colours."

"I know," said Ingram; "and her poetry."

"And her poetry," Senhouse agreed. "One doesn't often find girls of her age with a sense for poetry, and when one does, one is apt to value their acquaintance. Her feeling for it is instinctive. She takes it in through the pores, and——"

Ingram was stroking his buckskins. "I know," he said slowly. "But I don't suppose you came shooting up here to talk about poetry to me. Shall we, do you think, come to the point?"

"Yes," Senhouse said. "I'm much obliged to you once more. But it was necessary to make you understand how she and I stood."

"And do you think you've done it?" Ingram asked him, with another sharp look.

"Not yet," said Senhouse. "It is now my business to tell you that I love her." He saw the flush under the brown skin, and the cold gleam in the eyes.

"Have no concern for that," he went on. "I saw long ago that I had no chances whatever against yours. I contented myself as best I might, by tell-

ing her so from a distance. It has made no difference as to our friendship, thank goodness, and it has made no difference to my love."

Ingram frowned. "Damn your love!" was in his mind, but he said nothing.

"Now," said Senhouse, leaning forward, "just consider these facts in the light of what I've now told you. Miss Percival, who was one-and-twenty last month, has been cut out of her family's Bible, by her mother, and, so far as I can learn, by her sisters. Her father, a timid, affectionate old gentleman, daren't have her home, but sees her furtively in the city. No doubt he would see that she didn't want for actual money; but he's not supposed to know where she is. In actual fact, nobody else knows where she is but me. Why these difficulties have befallen her you know better than I do. But you'll allow me to say that they concern me very much, and the more so as I'm powerless to help her. I think you'll see how and why they concern me. I think you'll probably see why I'm here. In order that you might, I took leave to trouble you with my private affairs."

Ingram did not reply at first. It was to be seen that he was intensely annoyed, also that he was tempted to lash out at this fellow, who, by every word that he uttered, put himself more fatally in his power. Power is a great snare to a man of this sort. It's really rather creditable to him that he restrained himself. He did so, of course, because he wanted Sanchia's address.

As usual, he struck out for it. "Where is Miss Percival at this moment?"

Senhouse, smiling darkly, replied, "She's in London."

"You've told me that already," Ingram said sharply. "I'm asking you her address in London."

"I know you are," Senhouse replied. "I don't know, however, whether I've got the right to give it you." Then they settled down to their work in earnest.

"Does she know that you are here?"

"She knew yesterday that I intended to come."

"Do you mean that she sent you?"

"Far from that. She forbade me to come."

"Then you took upon yourself——"

"I did. You would have done the same in my place."

"I am not in your place, as you know very well. We won't discuss these things, I think. I take it that you refuse me her address?"

"You may take it that I'm not empowered to give it you. I can get you her father's address in the city."

"I won't trouble you, thanks. I have it."

"He has his daughter's address, you know," Senhouse said, in deadly calm.

"Look here," said Ingram, "what do you want with me here?" Senhouse absorbed him—seemed to suck him dry.

"I want you—extraordinary as you may think it—to marry Miss Percival."

Ingram jumped to his feet. "This must end," he said. "I don't know you—you are taking a liberty. My affairs are not yours, and I simply decline to discuss them with you. Perhaps you'll be good enough to understand that."

"I do understand it," Senhouse said. "I knew before I came here what would happen. I must ask you to be patient with me. Miss Percival——"

"You shall leave her name out while you talk to me," Ingram broke in.

Senhouse said, "How can I? We both love her, and she loves you. She is in great trouble, and has nothing but her inexperience to protect her. Her inexperience, and me. Whatever it costs me in the loss of your esteem, you can't expect me to stand by and do nothing. I am her friend: you know it as well as she knows it. Very well; now listen to this. I undertake to tell you that if you go to her father with your proposals of marriage you'll be listened to; and more than that. The whole of this disastrous business will settle itself down. I'm certain of it. Now, in telling you that, I take it that I'm giving you something which you didn't know before. You ought to be obliged to me for my interference in your affairs, though I can see that you are not. I give you—deliberately—a way out, to which, so far as I can see, you can't possibly take exception. I don't see any other plan for you—short of leaving her alone."

Midway through this speech Ingram had suddenly changed his whole purpose, which had been

distinctly to ring the bell and have the visitor shown the door. Midway, however, he became attentive, and as it went on he steadied himself.

He was now almost suave. "You have put the thing, from your point of view, very fairly. I am bound to say so. I don't know whether I can go so far as to admit any obligation; but there's no harm in owning up to the justification which you possess—or which I suppose you possess."

"My justification," said Senhouse, "is simply my regard for Miss Percival's welfare."

Ingram smiled. "Rather more than that, I should have thought. You saw her yesterday, you tell me?"

Senhouse nodded.

"And she wrote, no doubt, asking you to come and see her?"

"I told you that we corresponded," Senhouse said.

"Quite so. And I remember that you hadn't seen her since June, when she introduced us."

"That's quite true."

"Then," said Ingram, one knee on a chair, and his elbow on the knee, "then I may assume that, yesterday, she told you, for the first time, how things stood between herself and me?"

"Yes; you may assume that. She doesn't write about them."

"She prefers to talk?"

"Yes."

"Now," said Ingram, "you have been talking

to me about my business, and I have admitted your right, or, rather, what seems to you to be your right. I wonder if you'll allow me to ask you this question. What did Miss Percival propose to do?"

Senhouse considered him and his smooth, apparently direct question. He liked its directness, but its smoothness puzzled him. His reply, finally, was: "She proposed to do nothing but employ herself."

Ingram commanded his patience. "You don't quite understand me. She told you, I believe, something—possibly everything—about our relations. My question was intended to be, What did she propose to do in that business?"

"My answer again," Senhouse said, "is that she proposed to do nothing. Surely you don't ask me to believe that it's the lady's part—to make proposals?" Without knowing it, by right instinct merely, he had done his best for Sanchia.

Ingram, seeing that he was to get nothing to his purpose by his questions, was now plainly fatigued. It seemed to Senhouse his opportunity for an appeal. He got up, and began to walk the floor.

"There's no one known to me with higher courage than Sanchia. She has the divine fire in her; it shines in every act of her life. And she has a mind; she can think out her course, foresee it, and live through every stage of it, and undergo every stage's previsioned pain. To love such a woman

as she must become is—must be—to be put on one's mettle. You know—you can't have lived in her society as you have, can't have commended yourself to her, gained her confidence, and won her heart, without being the greater man. You won't deny it—I am certain that to every stave I sang in her honour, you would sing a louder. Don't think I grudge you your triumph; I declare that I could give her to you with thanksgiving. If you'll have me at your wedding, I shall come gaily. I should be proud to be the friend of the man whom she loved. He must be a better man than I am. I desire, therefore, your friendship. It would not be possible for me to suppose you would meditate a wrong against her. If I did that, do you think I should be here? I declare to you that I know you incapable of it. When I told you that I hoped you would marry her, I meant it with a whole heart. She loves you and waits for you. She trusts you utterly. God is my judge that I cannot do otherwise. What she has been to me—a lamp, an inspiration—that and much more she will be to you. Have no fear. She has said things to me of you which you yourself may hardly expect to hear from her. But you'll do better: she will live them; you'll see her thoughts at work. Now, listen to this: I'm perfectly serious. She has in her a capacity for self-sacrifice which, to me, argues a Godhead. Possibly all good women in love have the same: probably they have. I have never been in love with a good woman before, and shall never love

another. One reads of Antigone, and Iphigenia, and others: great tales which we believe as we read. Mr. Ingram, Sanchia will do what the poets fabled. I read it yesterday in her steadfast eyes; I heard it spoken calmly from her lips. If that don't humble you, it humbled me. I went out from her door a better fellow. If I never see her again, never hear from her—these things I leave to her—I shall be content. I have seen her face the world in arms, and have grace enough to know my salvation when it's before me." He stopped and looked queerly about him—seemed to awake out of sleep. "I don't know what I've been saying. You must forgive me. I love her, you know."

Ingram was still suave. "I know, I know. I quite understand. I'm very much obliged to you for coming—and for what you've said about myself. I don't speak so readily as you do, you know. I know very well what I mean to do, and am content to leave my intentions in—in Miss—in her hands, you know. I am glad we are to part—if we must part—in this way. Very glad indeed. You told me just now that you trusted me—may I ask you to show it? I think that I should have her address in London. I do indeed."

Senhouse looked at him. It was on the tip of his tongue. Then he lifted his hands. "I can't do it. I'm awfully sorry. She didn't authorise me— No, no, don't ask me that. I should go directly to her father's office, if I were you—with your proposals. That's all I can say."

"It's all you intend to say, anyhow," Ingram said, highly chagrined.

"My dear sir," Senhouse protested, "it's all that is possible." Ingram made no reply. They parted amicably, Senhouse most unwilling to go; but Ingram was determined to get rid of him.

Senhouse well away, he rang the hall bell. "Jackson," he said, "tell Ambrose to pack my things. A lot of things. I'm going to London until further notice. I shall go by the two o'clock train, so he'd better look sharp. I shall want him, of course. And Vickars had better take those horses back. I shan't ride. That's all, Jackson."

Jackson retired, and the master of Wanless stood in mid-hall, his hands deep in his breeches pockets.

"A damned, impudent, hardy rascal," he said to himself. "A damned chap."

CHAPTER XXVII

VALEDICTORY EPISTLE FROM THE OPEN COUNTRY

On his return to London from Felsboro' my stricken friend called at Beauchamp Place, but failed to find his divinity. She was, no doubt, at her school in Chancery Lane.

He was allowed into her room to write her a note, and found it fragrant with her late presence. Her writing-case, some pencils, a camel's-hair brush; violets in a tumbler; the little *Dante*, the *Shelley* which he had given her: on the mantelpiece a photograph of Ingram's light eyes, cropped head, and jutting chin. There also, had he but seen it (but he did not), was another reminiscence: Percy Charnock's chance shot of herself dipped half in the pool and of her servitor afloat on the bed-raft. That he did not see—and it may have been well for him, since the past was most past, as he knew, and such sharp remembrance had best go with it.

He wrote his note:—

"I have been, and returned. Forgive me that I dared do no less, and have done so little. To-morrow to fresh woods! Know me only for yours my life long, to use where you can and how you will. Charnock's house will always find me. I

shall never be far from you; a part of you will always be with me.—J. S."

Then he went his way out into the Open, and if he felt winter already in the wind, he had his philosophy for a muffler.

He wrote to her no more, and heard nothing from her through that winter. He plunged himself into his works; lost his taste for painting, but wrote much—among other things, his *Defence of Anarchy*, which, I understand, made some stir in the retired eddies of the European stream, and his *Brauronian*, a sequence of Sonnets, which made no stir at all, anywhere. He began his gardening upon a serious plan, using England itself for his garden-plot—a work which was to cause some mind-searching on the part of students of our wilds and a good deal of commotion among gamekeepers, bailiffs, and coast-inspectors. He told himself that his zest for living at large was gone; he told himself so at frequent intervals. But he made no advances to his father the Alderman, and declined the amenities of Bill Hill (warmed throughout with hot air) in favour of a gipsy tent at the covert's edge when the north-easters of February were driving the snow down the glades, and the ground was like ridged metal.

About the end of February he was in Wiltshire, on the Dorsetshire border, using the hospitalities of an appreciative peer. A great and ancient yew-wood lies there in a hollow of the downs; a home

of mysterious peace. From its southern edge the rolling grass runs up like racing waves to Pentridge. Barrow and tumulus, mist-pool and dyke are all the features in the pale waste of grass: mere dimples and scars in its grey immensity. Such as we are in the starry field, such are our *Hic-jacets* on the wrinkled earth. Crouching here, on the lee of the great wood—a thousand years in whose sight are but as yesterday—warming his thin hands at a fire of drift, our friend looked out over the empty world, and could still say, "I am made one with Nature."

He watched steadily the faint light of the sun upon the hills, saw now and then a hare bounce for a few short yards, and then sit high on the watch, with ears erect. Afar off, like a white blur upon the dun, he guessed at a flock of sheep; and on the horizon presently saw the gaunt and giant form of a shepherd in a cloak. Keen-sighted as he was, he saw the man's hands clasped on the head of his staff, and at his feet his dog, like a black speck. Nesting plovers wheeled and wailed; behind him a robin shrilled for company. Nothing was astir on this bare March evening; but hidden in the stony sods he knew the green sprouts were breathing, The time is at hand; is always at hand.

What we can do is so little; our courage to do it is so much. Courage is, in fact, our life—to tell ourselves the truth, and to do it. Life is a lovely thing when our hopes are high, but the secret is to know it lovely and loveworthy when we have no

hopes at all, and see nothing before us but this dun waste, this frost, this dumbness, and this eternal death. So he lifted up his eyes unto the hills—to Pentridge the grey and old—and hailed them for comrades.

Habit is strong; Use-and-Wont, behind whose skirts we cower—like partridge-chicks when the hawk wheels up into our sky—she, the old hen-bird, can use her beak upon us when we choose impudently for the Open Country. She had hit him, Senhouse, only yesterday a sounding buffet with her dusty wings, when a gamekeeper had delivered him a letter from the post-office at Sixpenny-Handley which bore the postmark Felsboro', R.S.O., and, opened, began, "Wanless Hall, My dear Jack." No need to look at the signature, "Yours ever, Sanchia," to tell him its news. She had made her great leap into the dark. That truth pealed in his brain straight and hot from his heart.

He had kept vigil upon it all night in the deep yew-wood. In the morning he had slept, and when he awoke it sat at his head. During the day he had roamed the hills, drifting like one of the peewits of the grass, not voicing his griefs as they do, but grieving internally, wailing at the heart. Now as he sat and looked upon great Pentridge he was able to tell himself the truth, and to do it.

The pang and ache of loss—they were his, and must be. Deadly fear had been with him all night; but now he could look on Pentridge and tell himself there was nothing to fear. No harm ever yet

fell on a good woman. He could say so now, and believe it.

Do him the justice to believe that it had never entered his mind to blame her. Blame her! What, for an act of divine compassion, for a swift, unfaltering act of love, sprung, as the love of God springs from pure Pity! Ah, no indeed. He could thank his Gods simply that his eyes had seen such a flight as this of hers. The deed, and the way of it, the swift, unerring way of it, seemed to him miraculous in one born of a woman. His eyes filled now with tears, but they were gentle. "O God, be with her always!" Resolute to scan the Open Country with his prayer upon his lips, he thought to see the sun-stream burn upon the hills. And as he looked for it, it was there.

He wrote to her before dusk. "I wish you happy, and believe that you will be so. You have been true to yourself: there's no other way. Many have done as you, Sanchia, but none, I believe, so simply, with such singleness of heart. The Gods, of whose company you are, keep you! Yes, you will be happy, my dear one; and I shall know it, and rejoice. Farewell!"

THE END

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